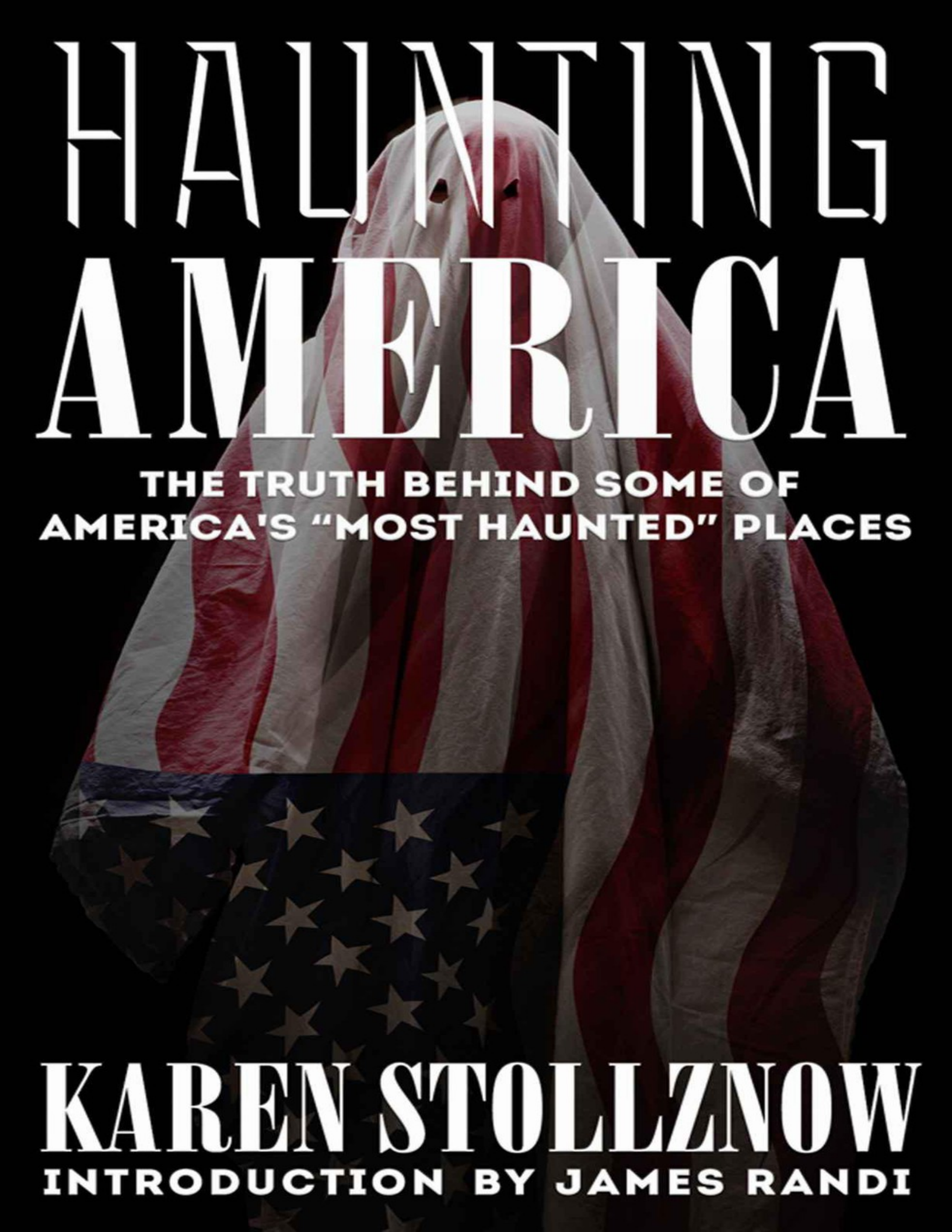
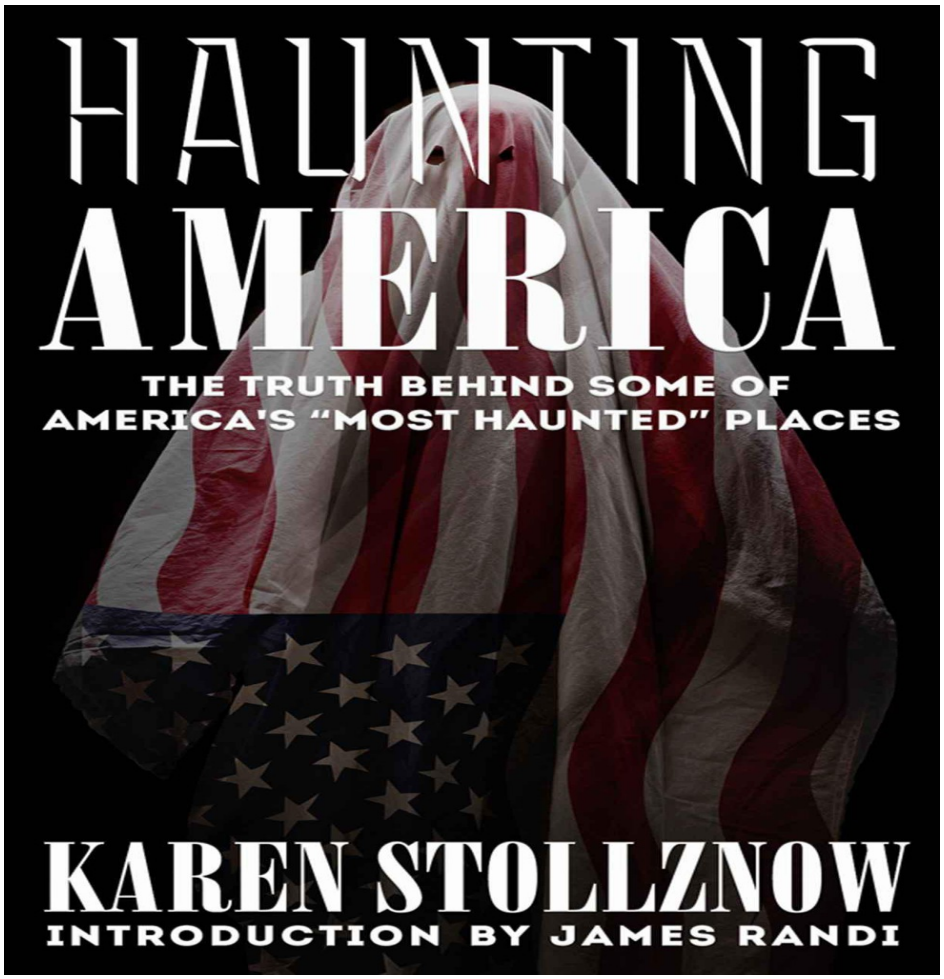
HAUNTING AMERICA



THE TRUTH BEHIND SOME OF AMERICA'S "MOST HAUNTED" PLACES

KAREN STOLLZNOW

INTRODUCTION BY JAMES RANDI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United States

Haunting America

Karen Stollznow

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks goes to Matthew Baxter, Bryan Bonner, Rick Duffy, and Stu Hayes for their invaluable research assistance and dedication to helping me get to the bottom of these legends. These fellow investigators love mysteries as much as I do, but we all love solving them even more. I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to Matthew Baxter and Nikolas Kovacevic for accompanying me on various investigations and assisting in my fieldwork. I would also like to express gratitude to Gary Goldberg, Chris Hobart, Sheldon Helms, Tana Owens, Stanley Rose, and Lisa Townley for their advice and feedback. Thanks to D.J. Grothe for initiating this project, and to the James Randi Educational Foundation for giving a home to *Haunting America*.

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Foreword

by James Randi

In this excellent selection from the myriad of myths, swindles, frauds, theories and just plain dumb ideas that our species has managed to conjure up, author Karen Stollznow has given us eight chapters that give a good idea of the variety of nonsense that has kept the public laying down money to learn totally useless and even damaging data that is—admittedly—rather attractive and sort of fun.

Briefly, I'll give you an acidic summary of the case of "Coral Castle," which is quickly seen to be about a structure that is both not a castle, nor made of coral… The very strange builder, Ed Leedskalnin, is said to have used paranormal powers to construct the various parts of this weird assemblage, since he did it all alone, mostly while concealed from sight, and was a truly little guy—100 pounds—who very much stayed to himself. The fact is that there wasn't much of a mystery to be found here, though promoters—and the eventual inheritors of the novelty—reached far to sell the impossibility of the legend.

For one thing, Ed left behind all the tools that he'd used, and any self-respecting Boy Scout can figure out how the job—though strenuous—was accomplished, given that time was not a factor in the project. Ed had no deadline to meet. With basic knowledge of the laws of leverage, and with the aid of simple tools such as block & tackle, cables, chisels, cylindrical rollers, jacks, levers, sledges, slings, and wedges, all of what Ed produced could be made, although with considerable labor…

That sort of simple, basic, investigative work and reasoning is the basis of the truth to be found in *Haunting America*, so well expressed and explained here by Ms. Stollznow.

Introduction: Legends that Haunt America

America is more haunted than ever before. In recent decades, paranormal television has popularized places that are believed to be haunted. *Ghost Hunters*, *Ghost Adventures*, *Most Haunted*, *Fact or Faked: Paranormal Files*, and many more shows have promoted numerous locations as haunted, and have crafted a steady stream of new legends along the way. They have also created a demand for more hauntings, and have spawned many "nouveau haunted" places to feed the reality TV beast. The psychologist Robert A. Baker (1921-2005) used to say, "There are no haunted places, only haunted people." For some of these people, the historical seems to equal haunted. Today, every historic restaurant, theater, and hotel appears to have resident ghosts, especially if the place has a big mortgage. There is profit in the paranormal. This is the business of haunting, and the "most haunted" is often the most marketed.

However, some locations have long-held reputations of being strange or haunted. *Haunting America* visits some of these classic places that haunt America. Alcatraz prison was closed decades ago, although it is believed that some ghostly prisoners never left the island. The Lemp Mansion was the home of the beer baron family thought to be the victims of a curse that drove several members to commit suicide. The Myrtles Plantation is said to be the site of ten murders and at least twelve ghosts. Waverly Hills Sanatorium was a tuberculosis hospital during the epidemic of the twentieth century, and is reportedly the most haunted place in the country. All of these places fight for the title of "most haunted" in America.

These are legendary, must-see places, and people make pilgrimages to these supernatural shrines from all over the country. They also travel from around the globe; I traveled from Australia to visit them. In what is known as "legend tripping", intrepid travelers try to recreate the fabled phenomena. They drive to the San Antonio railroad tracks to see if the tiny hands of ghostly children will push their car across the railroad crossing to safety.

They visit The Myrtles Plantation hoping to capture a photo of the spirit woman and children trapped in the mirror. They camp overnight among the tombstones at Silver Cliff Cemetery to catch a glimpse of the dancing blue lights. They scour Coral Castle looking for hidden codes and the secrets of the universe. They trek through the "body chute" at Waverly Hills to follow the final path taken by thousands of corpses that were wheeled down the tunnel. People go to these sites because they are famous, as much as they visit them because they are believed to be haunted.

Legend tripping is exciting but it can be a dangerous pastime too. It is risky to play on railroad tracks that are still in use, or to hunt for paranormal activity in a dark building that is falling to pieces. The intention of this book is not to take the fun out of the haunted, because who doesn't love a good ghost story? *Haunting America* recounts the popular legends of these places, which are prefaced with the caveats, "It is said" and, "According to legend". There are tales of haunted paintings, ghostly animals, poltergeists, and phantom piano playing. We find out about Timmy, the ghost of a little boy who likes to play ball with the living, the specter of a slave woman named Chloe who wears a turban to hide her missing ear, and the perverted spirit of Billy who spies on women in the restroom. We hear about Ed Leedskalnin who dedicated his whole life to erecting a castle for his "Sweet Sixteen", and the story of Sarah Winchester who spent her lifetime building a mansion for the spirits of people who died at the hands of the Winchester rifle.

However, there's a difference between enjoying these stories and believing in them. To believe in the ghosts we need proof. Paranormal television has shaped the public's ideas about what a ghost is, how to find them, and what constitutes "evidence". Unlike these shows, the investigations in this book don't rely on Electromagnetic Field readers, Geiger counters, thermal imaging cameras, or K2 meters. They don't involve the analysis of orb photos or recordings of Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVPs), which are believed to be voices of the dead. Instead of searching for phenomena, this book examines the specific claims and looks for possible natural explanations before resorting to paranormal ones.

This type of historical research and investigation involves visits to libraries, sifting through archives, examining primary documents and consulting other reliable sources. Fieldwork is important too, and each case includes a road trip to the premises, where I attend tours, speak with informants, and conduct hands-on investigations. I explore the folklore and the plausibility of these stories when taking into consideration the historical events. The more you research these stories, the less haunted they become. Sometimes, history can actually solve the case, or reveal that there isn't one…

The real history is more interesting than vague reports of weird feelings, or yet another account of phantom footsteps. These stories encompass major events and themes in America's history, including wars, slavery, immigration, mining booms and busts, crime and punishment, prohibition, and national disasters. They include famous people, such as Al Capone, the Birdman of Alcatraz, Harry Houdini, and Theodore Roosevelt. The human condition underpins these stories; success and accomplishment, love, revenge, tragedy, disease and death. It is easy to forget that there are real people behind the haunted stories. Unfortunately, when legend transforms the dead into ghosts it often turns them into caricatures.

The ghost stories are entertaining, but sometimes they do damage to America's history. Folklore has the habit of making history, or rather, making *up* history. Legends tend to supplant history in popular culture. Oral tradition, the Internet, television, and even books are so cluttered with folklore told as fact and embellished in the retelling that it can be difficult to reach the truth. A lot of information is often lost or destroyed, eyewitnesses pass away, and the folklore is all that's left behind. There will always be people who only want the stories, but this book is for those who love the legends, and also want to know the truth. *Haunting America* peels back the layers of folklore to reveal the fascinating facts behind some of the notorious legends that haunt America.

Chapter 1

Alcatraz

Alcatraz, otherwise known as “The Rock”, is yet another claimant to the title of America’s “Most Haunted” place, and it certainly reigns as one of the world’s most famous prisons. During its three decades of operation, Alcatraz was the “Hollywood” of prisons, with a cast of infamous outlaws and mobsters with aliases, starring Al “Scarface” Capone, Robert Stroud, the “Birdman of Alcatraz”, Arthur “Doc” Barker, Alvin “Creepy” Karpis, and George “Machine Gun” Kelly. Alcatraz held such a mystique that gangsters wanted to go there to enhance their reputation among other criminals.

Alcatraz still holds a mystique for many people. Alcatraz is larger than life, and the history of the prison is interwoven with legends of its brutality, its notorious criminals, and the question of whether it was escape-proof, or not. Shameless San Francisco tourists buy and even wear t-shirts that brag, “I Escaped Alcatraz”. One way or another, everyone escaped from Alcatraz, although legend holds that some ghostly prisoners never left the island.

The Rest is History

Alcatraz is an island in the San Francisco Bay that lies 1.5 miles from the mainland. The Bay waters hide what was once a valley, and The Rock is actually the top of a mountain. The uninviting island is rocky, whipped by salty winds, surrounded by icy waters and enveloped by fog, giving it a sinister appearance. It is said that Native American people avoided the area because they believed it was cursed, although the land was probably used as a fishing and hunting ground for the Ohlone and Miwok people. They obviously thought that the isolated location would make a great prison too. Those who broke tribal law may have been banished there, and there is archaeological evidence that it was used as a burial ground for these exiles.

Figure 1.1 Alcatraz Island.

The island is barren with very few plants and trees, but it is a haven for birds. When Spanish explorer Juan Manuel de Ayala sailed into the area in 1775, he named the island “La Isla de los Alcatraces”, meaning, the “Island of the Pelicans”. The name was eventually Anglicized to “Alcatraz.” Pelicans don’t nest on the island anymore, but the land is now home to hawks, ravens, geese, finches, hummingbirds and seagulls. During Spanish occupation, Native Americans also used the island as a refuge for those who didn’t want to be converted by the Christian missionaries.

During the California Gold Rush (1848-55), San Francisco grew from a small outpost of 300 people to a bustling boomtown of 30,000, and Alcatraz went through a number of identities. In 1854, a lighthouse was built for ships to navigate the foggy weather. San Francisco Bay was vulnerable to enemy attack, so the island was fortified and by 1858 Alcatraz was a seacoast fortress. Before Alcatraz became a civilian prison, it was a military prison. Between the years 1860 and 1933 a mixed bag of prisoners were sent to the island. During the Civil War era, captured Confederate soldiers were

imprisoned, along with Union soldiers, for crimes including desertion, theft, assault, rape, and murder. The military prison housed Native American people involved in land disputes, convicts from the 1898 Spanish-American War, World War I conscientious objectors, and army soldiers who were imprisoned for punishment or retraining. Some of these early prisoners built the prison to house themselves.

In 1933, administration of the island was transferred from the War Department to the Department of Justice. These were the days of bank robbers, kidnappers, gangsters and other racketeers, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons had plans to build an experimental "super prison" for the nation's worst criminals. This project was much to the dismay of the people of San Francisco, who wanted a statue of peace erected on the island instead. In 1934, Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary opened as a maximum security prison for "incorrigible" prisoners.

The Hard Cell

Alcatraz had been modernized and was now the highest security prison in America. The building was constructed of rows of solid concrete cells that had no contact with outer walls. There were four cellblocks in total, and each was like a prison within the prison, with bars made of tool-resistant steel that could withstand cutting with a hacksaw. A mechanical locking system allowed guards to open individual cells or rows of cells remotely using levers. The prison also had the very first metal detectors. This was the end of the road for America's most dangerous and violent criminals who refused to conform to the rules of other prisons. Alcatraz was the prisons' prison system, ruled by the iron-fisted Warden James A. Johnston. As they said, "When you break the rules you go to prison. When you break the rules in prison, you go to Alcatraz."

About 1545 prisoners did time within these walls, but only men, because women weren't deemed to be incorrigible until 1969. The average stay was 8-10 years, although "Creepy" Karpis served 25 years in total, which was the longest stretch on the island. These prisoners were long-term troublemakers. No man was directly sent to Alcatraz, and only two men were ever paroled from there. Some prisoners were considered highly dangerous, or they were

escape risks. Others had abused their privileges in minimum security jails, while Alcatraz was a minimum privilege prison.

Figure 1.2. Robert Stroud, the "Birdman of Alcatraz".

Robert Stroud the "Birdman" was a murderer with a reputation for being violent and difficult to manage. At Leavenworth prison in Kansas, he murdered a guard, but his mother pleaded for his life, and President Woodrow Wilson commuted the sentence to life imprisonment. Yet over his time at Leavenworth, he enjoyed astonishing privileges. Stroud was an amateur ornithologist, and in an effort to present the prison as progressive and rehabilitative, he was allowed to study and breed canaries and sell them to the public. He even maintained a laboratory inside an additional cell. Stroud made several important contributions to the field, including the books *Diseases of Canaries* and *Stroud's Digest on the Diseases of Canaries*. Things got out of hand when his activities required a full-time prison secretary, and birds flying freely around his cell turned it into a dirty birdcage. When it was discovered that he was using his lab equipment to make home brew, Stroud was transferred to Alcatraz where he was no longer permitted to keep birds. The prison was so strict that, when Stroud's own biography was published, he wasn't allowed to read it because it contained chapters about his criminal life.

Alphonse "Al" Capone was a powerful gangster involved in prostitution rings, gambling, bootlegging and smuggling liquor, and murder; when he

was finally imprisoned in 1931, however, it was for tax evasion. During his time at the Eastern State Penitentiary, Capone continued to run his empire from behind bars. He lived in relative luxury, in a cell filled with fine furniture and carpeted with oriental rugs. Capone kept large reserves of cash hidden in his cell, and he generously tipped guards who performed favors for him. Guards gathered around Capone's radio with him, where they listened to music and radio serials. Capone enjoyed a flood of visitors, while his friends and family kept residence in a nearby hotel. When he arrived at the new prison in 1934, Capone expected the same deal. He attempted to bribe Warden Johnston repeatedly for privileges such as liquor and uncensored reading material, but there was no special treatment at Alcatraz. This prompted Capone's famous resigned remark, "Well Warden, it looks like Alcatraz has me licked".

Figure 1.3. Al Capone's cell at Eastern State Penitentiary.

Escape from Reality

It is said that Alcatraz was a barbaric prison where the inmates suffered brutal treatment and lived in appalling conditions. Their cells were filthy, overcrowded dungeons. They slept on the cold, hard floor without mattresses or blankets. They were deprived of heating, light, windows and running water. They were fed bread and water, while others were starved altogether. They weren't allowed to shower, shave, or brush their teeth. The prison was riddled with disease, yet the men were denied healthcare. They were forced into hard labor seven days a week without a break. Speaking was forbidden. They were harassed, beaten, tortured, and sometimes driven insane by cruel guards, and dozens of men eventually left the island wearing straightjackets. Prisoner violence was frequent, and murders were common. Alcatraz became known as "Hellcatraz", after ex-inmate Roy Gardner's book that describes the prison as a "tomb of the living dead."

Alcatraz was known to the locals as "Devil's Island", named after the controversial penal colony in French Guiana, and described in the book and movie *Papillion*. However, it is a myth that Alcatraz was an inhumane jail, and the claims of brutality and shocking conditions are either exaggerated greatly, or inaccurate. This dramatized version has its basis in the "Hollywood Alcatraz" that was (and still is) popularized in misleading movies. As an example, *Murder in the First* portrayed Henri Young as a destitute orphan who was placed in Alcatraz for stealing $5 to feed himself and his little sister. The true story is that he was a hardened bank robber who was known for aggressively taking hostages, and he once committed murder. He was one of the men who attempted to escape from Alcatraz.

Figure 1.4. Broadway cellblock.

In truth, Alcatraz was tough, but mostly fair. Warden Johnston disciplined prisoners through the rewarding, or withdrawal, of privileges. The Institution Rules and Regulations of the prison stated, “You are entitled to food, clothing, shelter and medical attention. Anything else that you get is a privilege”. This shelter included cells that were 5 feet wide x 9 feet deep. They may have been small, but they were one man to a cell, unlike the shared cells of other institutions. This gave the inmates privacy, and rendered them less vulnerable to attack by fellow prisoners. These cells were sparsely furnished, but each contained a bed, a toilet, a sink with running water, two shelves, a writing desk and lighting. Each cellblock was separated by hallways, which the prisoners nicknamed Broadway, Times Square, Park Avenue and Michigan Avenue. Alcatraz was not overcrowded, but the prison was comparatively small. The lowest number of residents was 222, while the highest number was 302, so the 336 cells were never filled to capacity. The

cell house is naturally cold, but it had central heating, and there were windows to allow in the light and sun.

The prison fare was surprisingly high quality, with as many helpings as the inmates liked, because Warden Johnston knew that poor food was often the cause of prison riots. A Christmas menu from 1954 shows that the inmates were served stuffed celery and ripe olives as appetizers; an entrée of roast tom turkey with oyster dressing, giblet gravy, and cranberry sauce; side dishes of snowflake potatoes and buttered peas; and, for dessert, pumpkin pie, fruit cake and coffee. They listened to Christmas carols sung by Bing Crosby and watched a cartoon before seeing the movie *Secret of the Incas*.

PROGRAM
Christmas Eve 1954
The following recordings will be played in the cell house :
O, Come All Ye Faithful
I'll Be Home For Christmas
God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen Bing Crosby
Silent Night Holy Night Charles Paul
O, Holy Night Kenny Baker
Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
Christmas Carols Fred Waring
Christmas packages will be distributed, courtesy of the Director, Prison Industries and the Warden.
Christmas Day
CATHOLIC MASS 8:30 A.M.
Father Richard Scannell, S. J.
MOTION PICTURES 1:30 P.M.
SECRET OF THE INCAS
Also
Shorts : CANINE I.Q. & CARTOON
MENU
Stuffed Celery Ripe Olives
Roast Tom Turkey
Oyster Dressing
Giblet Gravy
Snowflake Potatoes Buttered Peas
Cranberry Sauce
Parkerhouse Rolls
Bread and Oleo
Pumpkin Pie Fruit Cake
Coffee

Figure 1.5. The Christmas Day menu at Alcatraz prison, 1954.

Life on Alcatraz was strict and highly structured, and the prisoners followed a monotonous daily routine. In the early years, Alcatraz did enforce a silence policy. Inmates were only allowed to talk with each other during meals and recreation, so some created a primitive communication system through sewerage piping. Those who disobeyed the rule were placed in isolation, but

they quickly realized that there were not enough isolation cells to hold them all. They started talking en masse in protest, and the rule was later relaxed.

In a scene from the movie *Escape From Alcatraz*, inmate Rufe Persful was driven so insane by the silence rule that he cut off four fingers from his left hand. However, Persful suffered severe psychological issues that probably led to the incident. He used to complain there was an alligator in his cell, and he was later diagnosed with schizophrenia. Rather than denying medical care to the inmates, the prison had its own hospital. In the event that a condition was serious, the inmate was sent to the mainland for specific care. This was the case for Al Capone, who was relocated from the island when he became symptomatic with syphilis, a condition with which he had suffered for years but not been treated.

Privileged Information

Privileges were rewards for good conduct. These included sending and receiving mail, and visits from family and friends, although inmates were allowed only one visit per month. Having a job was considered a relief from the boredom. The inmates worked eight hours a day, five days a week, with smoke breaks. They could work in the docks, kitchen, the laundry, tailor shop, cobbler shop, the garden, or the library. Except for the kitchen, where contraband moonshine was made, the work was paid. Recreation was permitted on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, and they had an exercise yard where they played baseball, handball and table games. In return for good behavior, the inmates enjoyed movie nights, and some were allowed to paint, borrow a book from the library of 15,000 titles, or play music. When Al Capone stopped trying to bribe guards and became cooperative, he was allowed to keep a banjo that was a gift from his wife. He soon formed a prison band, the Rock Islanders, who gave Sunday concerts for the inmates.

Typically, the inmates had good relations with the wardens, who knew each man by name. Prisoners were more at risk from other prisoners and, while brawls were common, murders were not. There were only eight murders during the prison's thirty years of operation. The conditions were comparatively good, and Alcatraz was known to be cleaner and safer than other jails. Some prisoners even requested to be transferred to Alcatraz. Former bank robber Willie Radkay, inmate #666, considered his time at

Alcatraz to be “better than at any other penitentiary”. That is, if they followed the rules.

Full of Holes

The Hollywood version of Alcatraz is a prison honeycombed with tunnels and dungeons, as featured in the movie *The Rock*. This isn’t true, although when Alcatraz became a fort a number of underground solitary confinement cells were built. These were closed in 1934, and the D Block was built, a set of 42 segregation cells also known as the Treatment Unit. According to the inmate Rules and Regulations, the “segregation section of the institution is where privileges may be restricted to a minimum”.

Six of these were solitary confinement cells, known to the inmates as the “Sunset Strip”. They were also nicknamed the “Hole”, because they didn’t have windows. They were larger than the regular cells, and they contained a light bulb, toilet, sink and a bed. Inmates were only allowed one trip to the recreation yard each week, and spent the remaining time in their cells. The Birdman occupied one of these cells for six years of his stay on the island, then a further eleven years in a hospital cell.

Figure 1.6. The solitary confinement cells at Alcatraz prison.

The most serious offenders could be confined to the single “Strip Cell”, otherwise known as the “Oriental”. This was a cell without a sink or toilet, with only a hole in the ground. The inmate was stripped naked and placed in the cold cell, and a sleeping mattress was only provided during the night. The cell had a solid steel door that left the inmate in pitch-black darkness, which ensured complete sensory deprivation. This was punishment for the most severe violations and misconduct, and inmates were usually only kept in here for a few days at most.

The myths of poor conditions at Alcatraz have their basis in the testimony of inmate Henri Young, who had stabbed and killed fellow inmate Rufus McCain. Young spent a few months in solitary confinement for attempting to escape. He reported that the cell he occupied had no bed or mattress, and had a nauseating stench of sewage. Young lived on a diet of mostly bread and water, with only an occasional meal. There were no toothbrushes, soap, or

baths, and the only shower given was a bucket of cold water he watched a guard throw over a man.

Young's attorneys claimed that he spent three years in the Hole, and that this "cruel and unusual punishment" drove him to commit the murder, and that he couldn't be held responsible for his violent act. Several inmates were brought in to describe the conditions at Alcatraz, and although there were no first hand experiences, many recounted rumors of inmates being locked in dungeons and beaten severely. The jury sympathized with Young, and his sentence was reduced to manslaughter. Following this controversial trial, D Block was completely refurbished. The movie *Murder in the First* further portrays Alcatraz guards as savage and evil. In another fabricated scene, Young's Achilles tendon was slashed to prevent further escape attempts.

(No) Escape from Alcatraz

In the days of the military prison, escapes were common and usually successful. Prisoners typically stole boats to reach the mainland, or they swam to freedom. During its time as a civilian prison, escape attempts were far less common. Alcatraz had improved security features, a high warden to prisoner ratio, and frequent head counts. A major deterrent was the spread of deliberate rumors of "man-eating sharks" surrounding the island. The San Francisco Bay is full of sharks, although they are mostly Brown Smooth Hound sharks and Leopard sharks which don't attack people. Great white sharks are numerous in the Pacific Ocean, although they rarely venture inside the Bay. The main obstacle was the treacherous San Francisco Bay itself. The temperature is about 50 degrees Fahrenheit, the strong currents tend to travel outwards to the Pacific Ocean rather than to San Francisco, and the mainland was one and a half miles away.

Alcatraz was the Titanic of prisons, the inescapable prison from which prisoners escaped, (although "escape" depends on your definition). 37 men were involved in 14 separate attempts, 23 were recaptured, 7 were shot and killed, 2 drowned and 5 were declared missing. The prison never recorded any escape attempts as successful. Alcatraz was not escape-proof, but this doesn't mean it was easy to break out and there were several bungled attempts. In 1945, John Giles took advantage of his job at the loading dock, where he unloaded army laundry sent to the island to be cleaned. Over time,

he stole an entire army uniform. One day, he donned the uniform and climbed aboard an army launch, but his clever plan went awry. He was discovered missing immediately, and his boat didn't go to San Francisco as he'd hoped, but landed instead at Angel Island where correctional officers were waiting to meet him.

The 1946 Battle of Alcatraz was the most violent and deadly escape attempt. Six inmates overpowered a guard and tried to take control of the whole prison. A number of guards were held hostage and then shot at point-blank range. This turned into a three-day uprising that ended in the deaths of three inmates and two guards, while fourteen guards and one inmate were injured. Guards from nearby San Quentin prison and members of the Marine Corps were eventually called in to end the clash, with a bombardment of gunfire, mortars, and teargas. Surprisingly, the Birdman played a part in attempting to end the hostilities and to protect his fellow inmates from the conflict that ensued. Of the three conspirators who survived, two were executed by gas chamber at San Quentin. The final 19-year-old inmate received an additional life sentence.

Brothers Clarence and John Anglin and Frank Morris disappeared from Alcatraz on July 11, 1962. Their daring and elaborate escape was made famous in the Clint Eastwood movie *Escape from Alcatraz*. They used spoons to chip away at the rotted concrete around the ventilation grates in their cells and climbed out, replacing the vents with fake wall segments. They created decoy heads out of papier-mâché, complete with human hair swept from the barber shop floor. They placed the realistic dummies in their beds to trick guards during nighttime counts. They fashioned life vests and a raft out of prison-issued raincoats. Inmate Allen West also planned to join them, but he couldn't climb out of his vent and was left behind. The three men climbed on top of the prison through a vent, climbed down a drainpipe and made their way to the water. They were never seen again. However, personal effects belonging to the Anglins washed up on shore, and there is no evidence that they survived. The men were officially listed as "missing, presumed drowned", although this one remains a mystery.

Figure 1.7. Dummy head found in Frank Morris's cell.

A legend persists that the men swam to Angel Island where they were picked up by a waiting boat. Another theory is that the men swam ashore, and a number of people have demonstrated that escape from Alcatraz, and even survival, is possible. In the early days of 1934, the public was worried about having a maximum-security prison so close to the mainland, and a teenage girl swam to the island to prove that a criminal could do the same. In 1955, fitness guru Jack LaLanne swam from Alcatraz Island to Fisherman's Wharf while wearing handcuffs. In 1990, two 10-year-old children made the swim. The team from the television show *MythBusters* tested the claim and successfully paddled across the Bay on a makeshift raft. Today, hundreds of people complete the annual Escape From Alcatraz Triathlon.

Following the escape, the prison came under scrutiny. What was once the most high tech prison in the country was now dangerously deteriorated, yet it was still the most expensive penitentiary in the system to operate. Restoration was estimated to cost five million dollars. Maintenance costs were too high, and while prisoner numbers were small, a further 300 civilians lived on the island at any given time. Alcatraz had no natural resources so food, supplies, and water had to be shipped to the island. In 1963, after 29 years of operation, U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy closed Alcatraz; the remaining 27 prisoners were transferred to other jails.

In trying to create a new identity for Alcatraz, entrepreneurs submitted proposals for theme parks, shopping centers, resorts, and even a Statue of Liberty for the West Coast. During the years 1969-71 there was a period of Native American occupation by a group of nearly 100 activists who took over and held the island as native land. Today, Alcatraz Island is administered by the National Park Service and is one of the country's biggest

tourist attractions with over one million visitors each year. The island is listed as a National Historic Landmark - not because it was a famous prison, but because the 1857 guardhouse is a heritage building.

History in the Faking

Some believe that the prison is filled with the energy of those who came to Alcatraz and never left, and that some prisoners are serving an afterlife sentence too. Alcatraz's haunted reputation precedes its days as a prison: it is said that indigenous people considered the island to be filled with evil spirits and some ghost stories originate from Alcatraz's military prison days. There are no ghost tours at Alcatraz, but rangers, prisoners, and visitors report a wide range of paranormal activity on the island.

Some people have witnessed apparitions of Native American prisoners, and the ghosts of military prison inmates in nineteenth century garb. George "Machine Gun" Kelly has been spotted in the prison's church, while Alvin "Creepy" Karpis allegedly haunts the prison bakery and kitchen. A chair, typewriter, and other objects move about inexplicably in an old office, although the room is walled off with glass. People hear strange whispering, moans, crying, laughing and bloodcurdling screams. It is said that you can hear the sounds of footsteps, the clanking of chains, phantom gunfire, and cannon blasts. One building contained a clothing factory, where the prisoners made gloves, army uniforms and furniture mats; visitors claim to hear the humming of sewing machines in that room. Some hear the chirps of canaries coming from the Birdman's cell or the strains of a ghostly harmonica playing. There are reports that Al Capone's banjo-playing ghost still strums bluegrass tunes in the shower rooms and in his cell.

Some people report cold spots throughout the grounds, while some visitors experience intense feelings of dread or panic in the prison, especially in the Hole. According to legend, cell D14 was the scene of a puzzling murder. One night, the inmate in this cell began screaming that something with glowing red eyes was locked in with him. The terrified prisoner screamed uncontrollably for hours, until a terrible silence befell the cell. Strangely, the wardens never checked in on him until morning, when he was discovered dead, his face swollen and purple and his eyes bulging. It is said that the prisoner still appeared in the line-up for the next morning's call, before

disappearing into thin air. An autopsy revealed strangulation marks around the victim's neck; but this wasn't suicide, it was murder. However, there is no record of this incident and, while Alcatraz had a prison morgue, no autopsies were ever performed there.

The National Parks Service dismisses the claims that Alcatraz is haunted. Paranormal experiences are anecdotal, and there are natural explanations for the phenomena. As for the reports of "cold spots", anyone who has ever been to Alcatraz knows that the entire island is a cold spot. Former inmates stated that the prison was always chilly, and Mark Twain once described Alcatraz as being "cold as winter, even in the summer months." The eerie feelings that people experience could be the effects of imagination. The prison is an ominous-looking building with a foreboding atmosphere, and knowing the island's depressing history, it's no surprise that people feel a sense of fear or uneasiness.

I listened as I walked around the grounds and realized that noises traveling in from the mainland or found on the island could possibly account for the voices and other strange sounds heard on Alcatraz. The prison is built of metal and concrete, and given its excellent acoustics, normal sounds echoing in the corridors could be mistaken for clanking chains, cell doors slamming shut, the buzz of sewing machines, the twang of a banjo, or cannon shots (odder still, as Fortress Alcatraz never fired its own guns in battle).

Phantom footsteps and voices could be caused by people, not ghosts, while the unearthly cries and screams could also be the squawks of the noisy seagulls that live on the island. Bird calls might explain the canary chirps coming from Stroud's cells. In spite of his nickname, the "Birdman of Alcatraz" was not allowed to keep birds during his 17 years at Alcatraz. The objects moving in the administration rooms could be the staff pulling pranks, or the items might be moved around when they are being cleaned. Finally, the ghostly sounds of jingling cell keys make for a spooky story, but we should keep in mind that the cells were keyless.

Unforeseen Circumstances

Alcatraz has attracted popular psychic mediums that have supported these stories of lingering spirits, as well as created a few new ones. In 2004, ranger

Rex Norman was awakened by the sound of a heavy door swinging back and forth in cellblock C, but he found nothing to account for the disturbance. The activity continued, so the park system decided to bring psychic medium Sylvia Browne in to investigate the case. They also brought in a journalist from the *San Francisco Chronicle* and former prisoner Leon Thompson who had served time in Alcatraz between the years 1958 and 1962. Browne toured the grounds and in the laundry she had a strong reaction. "There was violence here. I see a man. He's tall, bald, and has tiny little eyes. I'm getting the initial M, but think they called him 'Butcher'." Norman was baffled, but Thompson was able to validate Browne's reading. He said, "I remember Butcher. He was a hit man with Murder Inc. before they caught him. His name was Abie Maldowitz, but we called him Butcher. Another prisoner killed him in the laundry room."

Folklore now tells that "prison records confirmed that Abie Maldowitz, a mob hit man with the name of Butcher, was killed by another prisoner in the laundry room of the cell block". In an attempt to "release" Butcher, Browne held another séance at Alcatraz, but he refuses to go to the other side. However, the journalist reported that Thompson had said Abe Malkowitz, not Abie Maldowitz. At any rate, the official Inmate Register does not list either name. There was an inmate by the name of Hugh Butcher, #287, who was imprisoned for counterfeiting, although he wasn't murdered in the laundry room because he was released in 1936.

Bail Out

The National Park Service proposes an explanation for the distorted history of Alcatraz: "For security purposes, visits to the island were restricted; this apparent secrecy and the remoteness of the prison may have fuelled these rumors". The media were keen for stories about the prison's high profile prisoners. Reporters would phone the prison to ask how "Big Al" liked the weather and what job assignment was he holding. However, prisoner information was never divulged, and the media were not allowed on the island. Any member of staff who spoke to them was fired. Prisoners were never released from Alcatraz but transferred to other prisons to finish their sentences, so the media couldn't speak with them directly upon release. When they did emerge, many ex-prisoners sensationalized their experiences,

fueling the public's interest and imagination. With a lack of reliable information, many misleading stories arose and these grew into folklore.

Alcatraz doesn't need the myths to present a tragic tale of crime and punishment. These prisoners had the best views in the worst house in the San Francisco Bay Area. Staring out through the barred windows, the inmates could see the Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, the headlands and the beaches. This was a constant reminder that they had lost the greatest privilege of them all: freedom.

Chapter 2
Coral Castle

Coral Castle is a sculpture garden in the town of Homestead, Florida, nestled between Miami and the Florida Keys. The landmark has been compared to the Great Pyramid of Giza, the Moai statues on Easter Island, and Teotihuacán in Mexico. It is likened to Stonehenge, and even known as "America's Stonehenge". The most remarkable fact about Coral Castle is that it was built by one man: Latvian immigrant Edward Leedskalnin. Ed spent 30 years using primitive tools to single-handedly excavate, carve, and construct 1,100 short tons of rock. He built the place as a tribute to his "Sweet Sixteen".

There are many conflicting stories about Coral Castle's creator. It is said that Ed only had a fourth-grade education, but he was a genius. He stood 5-foot-tall, weighed only 100-pounds and was sickly, yet he had superhuman strength. No one ever saw Ed at work, but people spied him lifting or even levitating heavy blocks of coral. Numerous theories have been proposed to explain how one man could build these sculptures unassisted and without the use of modern machinery. Some speculate that he used anti-gravity, electromagnetic force, harmonic sound waves, ley lines, or levitation. Others believe that aliens assisted him, or that he was an alien. Ed used to say that he had "discovered the secrets of the pyramids". It is lamented that he took those secrets with him to the grave, so we will never know how or why Ed built Coral Castle.

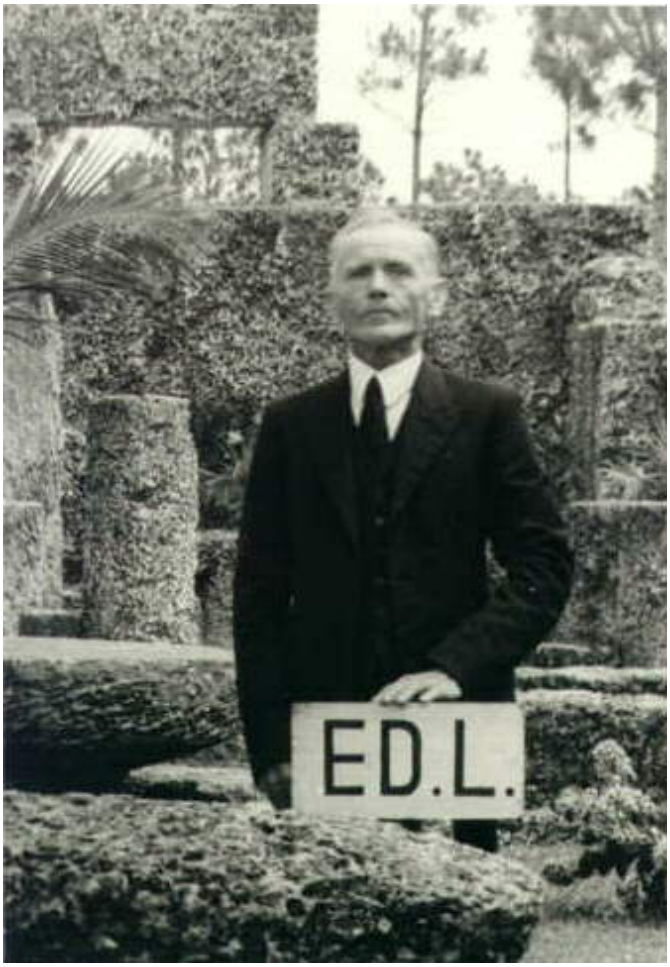

Figure 2.1 Edward Leedskalnin.

Love Turned to Stone

Coral Castle is inseparable from the story of its creator. Ed was born in Stāmeriena Parish, Latvia, in 1887. According to legend, at the age of 26, Ed was engaged to 16-year-old Agnes Scuffs. The night before the ceremony, Agnes broke off the engagement suddenly, and broke Ed's heart. Another version of the story says that she jilted him on their wedding day. When the priest asked if she was ready to commit to Ed, Agnes couldn't bear to say, "I do", and she left him standing at the altar. It is believed that Agnes called off the wedding because Ed was too old for her, too poor, too uneducated, she had another admirer, or that her parents didn't approve of the union.

Ed was so heartbroken and humiliated by her rejection that he left Latvia, never to return. He decided to immigrate to the United States: a land of opportunity where a nobody could become a somebody. Ed arrived in New

York at the Ellis Island port, and he wandered across North America. He performed various manual labor jobs in New Jersey, British Columbia, Texas, Washington, Oregon, and California. During these travels Ed contracted tuberculosis. He heard that Florida had a warm climate beneficial to his condition, so he headed east to Florida City.

One day, realtor Ruben Moser was driving when he noticed a man lying in a heap by the side of the road. It was Ed who was now gravely ill. Ruben and his wife Frances took him in and nursed him back to health. When he had recovered from his illness, Ed began searching for a block of land with Ruben's help. It seemed that he wanted to settle down and build a home. In his search he rejected the good farmland, saying mysteriously, "I'll know what I want when I see it". Some say he used dowsing to find the right property. He finally found an area he liked, although Ruben advised him against buying the land, as the native limestone bedrock was found just a few inches below the topsoil. This land was useless for farming, but perfect for Ed's plans and he purchased 10 acres of property in Florida City.

Ed didn't want to build a home after all. Instead, he proceeded to quarry the limestone rock known as oolite, and used it to build a fantasy garden of sculptures that he called Rock Gate Park. When asked why he built the park he answered wistfully, "For my Sweet Sixteen". For the next three decades he built this homage to his lost love, or perhaps to woo her back. Ed's Sweet Sixteen never saw Rock Gate Park, and he died alone in 1951. This sad and strange story was the inspiration for Billy Idol's 1987 ballad *Sweet Sixteen*.

It is widely believed that "Sweet Sixteen" was a reference to a woman named "Agnes Scuffs", although this name isn't particularly Lettish. Some sources present her last name as the more Baltic-sounding *Skuvst*. In the book *Koraļļu Pils* by Andris Stavro her name appears as Hermīne Lūsis. Another theory is that Ed was in love with the Moser's teenage daughter Lois, or that "Sweet Sixteen" was a fantasy woman and not an actual person. It is said that a reporter tracked down the woman in Latvia and invited her to the United States to visit this tribute. She declined the offer and snapped, "I wasn't interested then and I'm not interested now!"

Castles in the Air

“This isn’t a real castle! Where’s the moat?” I overheard a visitor complain on the tour. Technically, the “castle” is not even made of coral; it is built from oolite limestone. Originally named “Rock Gate Park” by Ed, the park was renamed “Coral Castle” by its next owners. The tour guide says that as a monument to love, “the only other tribute that can compare to the Coral Castle is the Taj Mahal, built over twenty years and by several thousand slaves.” Some marvel that Coral Castle is the Eighth Wonder of the World. At the very least it’s listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Figure 2.2 Coral Castle.

Coral Castle is a roofless house furnished with a hodgepodge of sculptures. Rooms without walls house furniture made of solid stone. The Family Bedroom displays twin beds, one for himself and one for his Sweet Sixteen, two children’s beds, a rocking cradle and a child’s rocker. The park has a total of 25 rocking chairs, including a “mad rocker”. This tête-à-tête chair has two interconnected seats that face opposite directions, so that he and his

Sweet Sixteen did not have to face each other if they had fought and were angry. They could sit in this chair and rock until they made up, or until they were hungry. Then they could eat together at the Feast of Love table that the romantic Ed built in the shape of a heart that weighs two tons.

A 20-foot long table is carved in the distinctive shape of the state of Florida, with a bowl to represent Lake Okeechobee, and a chair at the head for the Governor and his representatives so they could figure out ways to raise taxes. Ed believed that every home is a castle and that every castle should have a throne; so he built four of them. His Throne Room contains a rocking throne for himself, one for his Sweet Sixteen, a child's throne, and a particularly uncomfortable one for his future mother-in-law.

Ed's Moon Fountain represents the three phases of the moon, with a 23-ton wishing well that symbolizes the full moon, flanked by crescent chairs that represent the first and last quarter phases of the moon. A wall of planets features carvings of Mars and Saturn that weigh 18 tons each. There is a small crescent moon and a larger version weighing 23 tons that Ed called the Crescent of the East, and is the most iconic monument in the park. A sundial records the hours between 9 am and 4 pm, as Ed liked to say that these are the hours that a man should work. A 30-ton Polaris Telescope is fixed on the North Star, and stands 25 feet in height. The Great Obelisk weighs 28 tons, and a hole at its top is shaped into a six-pointed Latvian star. The obelisk stands at 40-feet tall, and is taller than the last upright post of the Great Trilithon at Stonehenge.

The Grotto of the Bears is a playground based on the fairy-tale of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. There are chairs for Papa Bear, Mama Bear, and Baby Bear, with a heart-shaped chair for Goldilocks and even a porridge bowl. The bizarre Repentance Corner features a set of stone stocks to punish his children-to-be if they misbehaved. The idea was to lock the child's head through an opening in the rock, and wedge them in place with a block of wood. With the child's full attention Ed could sit on a bench and discipline the naughty boy or girl. He believed that an hour of his lecturing would result in improved behavior for months. There was a larger hole for Sweet Sixteen if she became sassy, but not one for Ed!

Many of the sculptures are ornamental, although some are functional. Ed built a well to collect fresh groundwater. Nearby is an outdoor bathtub, and in the morning Ed would fill it with well water and wait for the sun to heat it up before taking his bath in the afternoon. He didn't have electricity so he stored food in sealed jars in the well. Ed even made a large wood-fired oven, using rock and parts of automobiles to make a large sealed pressure-cooker.

Rock Gate Park is an inside-out house that is uninhabitable, so Ed built himself separate living quarters in the corner of the park. The Tower is built of blocks weighing a total of 243 tons. The first floor room functioned as his tool shed and workshop. Sixteen steps lead up to the second floor where Ed lived in spartan conditions. He had a kerosene stove, a food chest, and a chair made from scrap metal and bicycle parts that hangs from the ceiling by parts of a horse harness. His uncomfortable-looking bed is made of boards wrapped in burlap sacking and suspended from the ceiling by chains on a pulley system, which he raised out of the way during the day.

Figure 2.3 The 9-Ton Gate.

The original name was “Rock Gate Park”, and the entrances are indeed built of rock, while four 8-foot tall walls surround the park. The North Wall contains over 150 tons of rock including one piece that weights almost 30 tons. Ed was so proud of having moved such a great weight that he topped it with four blocks creating a “crown”. The most famous sculpture is the Nine-Ton Gate; a revolving boulder gate that was so perfectly balanced that it could once be opened and closed with the touch of a finger. It is said that the design is so sophisticated that even a three-year-old could easily push open the door.

Moving Heaven and Earth

The carvings have been compared to the works of Michelangelo, although Ed’s sculptures are crude, rough-hewn, and simplistic in design. They are more striking for their sheer size, and this generates the most debate about Coral Castle. When asked how he moved these massive stone blocks, Ed became evasive or he would answer cryptically, “I have discovered the secrets of the pyramids.” It is believed that Coral Castle couldn’t be built without modern machinery such as forklifts, cranes, and laser drills, and that one man couldn’t accomplish these feats alone. Coral Castle is featured on the TV shows *In Search Of* and *Ripley’s Believe It Or Not* as a mystery, spurring numerous theories to explain how Ed built his park, and he is credited variously with superhuman strength, supernatural powers, or secret knowledge. Coral Castle is linked to a diverse array of phenomena, including Atlantis, the Bermuda Triangle, Stonehenge, and UFOs.

It is echoed that Ed was a tiny, frail, 5-foot-tall, 100-pound man. Conversely, it is claimed that Ed had superhuman strength, and was allegedly observed lifting the blocks with his bare hands. Others say that Ed moved the blocks using telekinesis. In one story some curious neighbors spied on Ed and saw him lay his hands on the stone. He started singing and the blocks began to rise. This is believed to be a Tibetan Monk technique that uses sound waves to elevate heavy objects. Some say that Ed used ancient alien technology, that he enlisted the assistance of extraterrestrial beings, or that he was an extraterrestrial. Others believe that Ed was a time traveler with undiscovered knowledge of hyperdimensional physics, and that he tapped energy from different planes to lift the blocks.

Some believe that Ed could break the laws of gravity. It is said that he used electromagnetic energy to reduce the gravitational pull of the Earth thereby rendering the stones weightless. Another opinion is that Coral Castle is built on an intersection of "ley lines" creating a powerful energy spot that enabled him to move the blocks with ease. Another popular theory is that Ed used levitation to move the blocks, and that a couple of teenagers witnessed the stones "floating like hydrogen balloons". Apparently, Ed could also levitate his body, so he wore heavy-duty shoes made from a car bumper to prevent himself from flying away. If this were true, why did he need to build his sixteen stairs? In truth, it seems that the spendthrifty Ed wore shoes with metal soles and heels to make them last longer.

In 1936, Ed began disassembling Rock Gate Park in Florida City and relocated to a new site with a quarry in Homestead. Some believe he made a miscalculation, and moved 10 miles north where the "telluric forces" were stronger. Other claim that developers were encroaching on his property and that Ed moved for privacy. In 1934, a group of young men trespassed on the grounds and attacked Ed, an incident that likely prompted his move. Alternatively, Ed may have moved not for privacy, but to have greater visibility for his park and to attract more visitors. It is said that Ed moved and rebuilt the park overnight.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Alternatively, it is said that no one ever witnessed Ed at work. He constructed Coral Castle in complete secrecy, alone, and at night, so that no one could watch him work. His neighbors spied on him, but Ed sensed when people were watching, and he'd stop work and wait for them to leave. It is true that Ed worked by himself and often at night by the light of the moon and a lantern. Ed did work during the day too, although he preferred to work during the night because of Florida's relentless heat and sun. He spent the long, hot days reading in one of his many chairs. So much for Ed believing that a man should work between the hours of 9am to 4pm!

Perhaps Ed wasn't as secretive as legend would have us believe. He built walls around Rock Gate Park, although these weren't erected until 1940, which was after his move, and when most of the sculptures were already built. Ed was a private man, but Rock Gate Park was open to the public. At

the entrance there is a handmade lever bell and the sign that says “Ring Twice.” If guests followed these instructions, and Ed was not busy, he would unlock the gate, and take them on a tour of the park. Ed was a shy man, but proud of his creation. He enjoyed watching visitors try out his rocking chairs and 9-ton gate. When he had an audience he loved telling stories about his Sweet Sixteen. Ed liked entertaining children and organized field trips for local school kids, during which he cooked hotdogs for them in his homemade barbecue. Ed was friendly and welcoming to visitors, and this was his livelihood. By 1936 alone, over 15,000 people had toured Rock Gate Park. After he died, his life savings of $3,500 were found on the premises, funds raised in part by a 10-cent entrance fee that was later raised to 25-cents. He also made money from the sale of pamphlets that explain his experiments and theories.

A Magnetic Personality

Despite only having minimal education, Ed is said to have been a genius. He spent years performing experiments with magnetic currents, and it is said that he even cured himself of tuberculosis using a treatment involving magnets. However, his writings suggest that his knowledge of scientific theory was self-taught. *Mineral, Vegetable and Animal Life* discusses Ed’s fringe theories about magnets. He writes about phosphenes, those “stars” we see when we sneeze or rub our eyes, but Ed believed this was a kind of “tiny lightning” caused by magnets in the body. He claimed he had invented a “perpetual motion holder” although the device is really a generator that only works when it is being cranked.

Some of the legends that Ed possessed a sixth sense may be attributed to the ideas he expresses in his pamphlets. In *Magnetic Base* he writes, “Many of you have noticed if you are looking with a concentrated look at someone’s back while the person doesn’t know it, the person is liable to get restless and look around. I have noticed sometimes that I can chase the mosquitoes away from the wall by only giving a sharp look at them.”

Ed’s *A Book in Every Home* is a political and moral treatise that reveals Ed to be a man of his time. His dated etiquette advice includes, “Girls should take smaller steps than boys. By taking smaller steps the body would not jump as much up or down or swing from side to side.” Ed discusses his high

expectations for a woman's purity. He reveals, "I always wanted a girl but I never had one," because he wanted an unsoiled woman, "the way Mother Nature puts her out." His views seem to imply that his "Sweet Sixteen" was more an ideal than a reality. However, some say that the book contains a code, and that "Sweet Sixteen' is just a metaphor for his secrets.

It is believed that there is a Coral Castle Code that explains Ed's secrets, and some try to decode alleged symbols hidden throughout the park. The number *7129-6105195* is inscribed on the entrance to Ed's living quarters, and it is said that he called this the "secret to the universe". Conspiracy theorists conclude that this number represents the Golden Ratio, or that it includes the angle on which the Great Pyramid is formed. Some say that if you isolate the sequence "51" hidden in the numbers, Ed had predicted the year of his own death. However, these numbers appear on Ed's Certificate of Citizenship.

Carved in Stone

In December of 1951, Ed became ill. He put a sign on his front gate that said, "Going to the Hospital", and he took the bus to the Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami. He died three days later, at the age of 64. Some say he died of stomach cancer, others think that tuberculosis finally claimed his life, although it appears that he died of malnutrition related to kidney failure. People lament that Ed "took the secrets of Coral Castle to his grave". Instead, it seems he left them behind. How did Ed build Coral Castle? A sign in his tool shed provides the natural explanation.

The most frequent question overheard here is: 'How did one man without assistance construct the coral castle?' The answer is: with an uncanny knowledge of the laws of leverage and balance, engineering and sculpture; and with the aid of simple tools such as metal falls, (block and tackle) rollers, jacks, wedges, slings, cables sledges and chisels. And above all, infinite patience and a tremendous imagination.

Figure 2.4 Ed's toolshed.

Some of these can still be found in Ed's tool shed: the rusty cogs, chains, hooks, hoists, pulleys, levers, screws, grinding wheels, wedges, winches, and other tools, both homemade and industrial. These existing artifacts are evidence that Ed used simple machines and known engineering principles to quarry, sculpt, and assemble the monuments in Rock Gate Park. When asked how he moved the blocks some say Ed provided mysterious replies, but other sources state that he responded with, "It's easy, if you know how," or, "I understand the laws of weight and leverage." These answers were probably closer to the truth. Suspended by chains on a pulley system, Ed's well, cooker, and hanging bed and chair provide clues as to the methods he employed. Ed didn't need modern equipment, which makes the task easier, although not otherwise impossible. To demonstrate this hypothesis, former construction worker Wally Wallington built a replica of Stonehenge in his backyard using only levers and fulcrums.

We not only have existing proof of Ed's collection of simple tools but we have photographic evidence of him using them. Ed was proud of his hard work, and he often posed with his tools and creations for a Brownie box camera. Several of these photos still exist, and they show that Ed had constructed at least three tripods. These sturdy A-frame tripods were constructed of wooden poles with platforms, and pulleys, chains, and hooks suspended from a brace. One of these tripods had steps built into one of the poles. The tripods had a box at the top, which served as a stabilizer, although this has spurred many theories that it holds a radio tuner to harness electromagnetic energy. Some of the images show Ed hoisting blocks of oolite. It is important to note that contemporaneous photos of oolite limestone being quarried show workers operating similar equipment to that used by Ed.

Figure 2.5 Ed using one of his tripods.

Some people believe that these photos were staged, because Ed was so tiny. Contrary to the claims, Ed listed his height as 5’6” and even 5’9” on government documents. However, in using techniques such as winches and counter weights, his size doesn’t matter. Furthermore, Ed not only had the necessary tools, but the practical skills and experience. He came from a family of stonemasons, and was himself a master stonemason who

specialized in carving tombstones. Before building Rock Gate Park he had worked as a day laborer in a number of jobs across the country, including work as a logger and ranch hand. Ed had also chosen a suitable medium. Oolite limestone is a porous, sedimentary soft rock that can be mined with hand tools, and is known for its relative ease of extraction and suitability for carving.

Ed was a survivalist. He improvised instruments from scavenged junkyard parts, using his cooker as a hearth for blacksmithing. He used truck springs sharpened into wedges to break blocks of coral loose from their bed. He utilized natural resources by building a well, and using solar power to warm his bathwater. He made a wheelbarrow from the brake drum of an old truck to move the oolite, placing a bicycle tire over his shoulders to support the load. There isn't a vortex or crystals under the 9-ton Gate that is estimated to weigh about five and a half tons. It balanced on ball bearings and the axle of a Model-T Ford, but it no longer works. These structures have withstood hurricanes, but not the erosive wind, rain, and sun of Florida. Some marvel at the seamless placement of the rocks, and speculate that Ed used magic, not mortar in his joinery. However, he used cement in joining the blocks because of Florida's destructive hurricanes.

Moreover, vintage video footage of Ed building Rock Gate Park has been discovered. Ed was featured in the "Person-Oddity" series filmed by Universal Pictures. "The Fantastic Castle" was released in May 1944 as a theatrical short screened before movies in cinemas. The camera pans across Ed's property, showing his quarry and tripods. Then we see Ed using his tripod and pulley system to hoist blocks of oolite from the ground. Then Ed uses a winch to raise and move a block that rests on logs. There are scenes of him working on his project while in the background there is a gathering of people enjoying the park. So much for the claim that no one ever saw Ed at work!

Figure 2.6 Still frame from "The Fantastic Castle" showing Ed working with an audience in the background.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Ed's move to Homestead provides insight into his project. Ed enlisted the assistance of his friend Bob Biggers, a farmer who owned a tractor. Ed had the chassis of an old Republic truck on which he laid two rails, and Bob pulled Ed's trailer carrying his carvings. There are claims that people saw these being conveyed along the old Dixie Highway, but allegedly no one saw Ed load or unload the blocks. However, Bob witnessed the move, and it was not completed in a single night. According to Bob, it took three days alone for Ed to place the obelisk in position in a 6-foot hole he had dug. By 1936 the park had not yet been completed. The park walls weren't erected until the sculptures were in place in the new location, so there was less material to transport. Even still, the entire move took 3 years to complete. Time is a crucial factor in this story. It took Ed almost 30 years to build Rock Gate Park. As the tour guide says, "Ed did not have another job; he devoted his life to building the Castle."

Ed was not the only person to undertake such a venture. A number of other people have built creations of a similar scale to Coral Castle. Ferdinand Cheval was a rural postman in the village of Hauterives, France. One day, during his rounds he tripped on a stone. He picked it up and was intrigued by its shape. He returned to the site and began collecting stones every day, becoming inspired to build a castle with them. He carried them in his pockets, until his wife became tired of mending them. Then he gathered them in a basket until the stones became too large to carry, so he used a wheelbarrow to transport them. For the next three decades he built a rock palace that he called Le Palais Idéal. Ferdinand was influenced by different styles of architecture, and his Palace includes a Catholic grotto, a Hindu temple, an Egyptian tomb, a medieval castle, a mosque, and a Swiss chalet. An inscription on one of the walls says that his project, "took more than 10,000 days or 93,000 hours over a period of 33 years to finish."

Justo Gallego Martinez was a Trappist monk in a monastery near Madrid in Spain. After eight years he developed tuberculosis and in 1961 he retired to avoid spreading his sickness. Justo prayed for healing and promised that if he was cured, he would construct a shrine in honor of Our Lady of the Pillar. True to his word, when he recovered he started building a cathedral on a block of farmland owned by his family. He had no construction plans, no training or skills. Justo used building materials and tools fashioned out of recycled materials. He didn't use cranes or other modern machinery. His homemade cathedral includes a main building, complete with a crypt, chapels, cloisters, lodgings and a library. Since 1963, Justo has worked on the project for ten hours every day, except for Sundays, his day of rest.

These cases share parallels with Ed's story. They were all simple men with minimal education. They were artists who combined sculpture with architecture using materials that were readily accessible and recycled. They used basic tools instead of modern machinery. They often did their construction at night, and they worked alone. They all devoted their lives to projects that had immense personal significance. With the right combination of ingenuity, perseverance, tools and time, these men created incredible monuments that are still enjoyed by people today.

Figure 2.7 Ed's sign welcomes visitors to Coral Castle.

Edward Leedskalnin was a remarkable person. He was quirky, kind, shy and lonely. He was a hardworking man, a skilled tradesperson, and an amateur inventor, engineer, and astronomer. With circumstance and the passing of time, the facts have evolved into urban legends, and Ed is not longer here to refute the myths. A sign at the entrance to Rock Gate Park announces, "You will be seeing unusual accomplishment. Ed." The supernatural explanations diminish Ed's unusual accomplishment, and underestimate human achievement.

Chapter 3

The Lemp Mansion

The Lemp family of St. Louis, Missouri, were beer-brewing barons in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They revolutionized the brewing industry and introduced America to lager beer, although they are remembered more for their home than their beer. The Lemp Mansion is a grand Victorian home that rests awkwardly beside the freeways and urban decay of the surrounding modern neighborhood. The house saw the rise and fall of the Lemp empire, from their humble beginnings as immigrants to their prosperity which was interrupted by Prohibition and personal tragedy. The Lemp family was beset by misfortune, and some believe that they were cursed. Four members committed suicide, and three of these occurred at the family home. The Lemp Mansion is said to be Missouri's most haunted house, and it claims the further title of one of the most haunted houses in America.

German Courage

Johann Adam Lemp immigrated to the United States from Eschwege, Germany in 1836. In 1838 he opened a grocery store in St. Louis, but he had something to offer that most grocers couldn't supply: beer. Adam, as everyone knew him, specialized in homemade distilled vinegar and beer. Using a recipe his father Wilhelm taught him, he introduced America to German-style lager. His beer was popular with the town's growing German population, and the general beer-drinking community who until now had only the choice of British dark ales and porters. He sold his homemade brew in a saloon beside his grocery store. Soon, it became so popular that he stopped selling flour, sugar, and vinegar, and began brewing beer full-time.

Lager comes from the German "lagern", meaning to stock or store, as this kind of beer needs to go through an aging process. However, St. Louis is known for its hot and humid summers, and these were the days before factory refrigeration. The city is also known for its natural limestone cavern

system, and so Adam erected his new business above the long, rambling caves. He stored and aged his beer in the caves below, and used blocks of ice chopped from the Mississippi River and taken to the cave to keep the casks cool. The site of his company, the Western Brewery, is roughly where the Gateway Arch stands today. By the time Adam died in 1862 he was a very rich man, and the Western Brewery was the largest brewer in St. Louis. Adam Lemp is remembered as the "Father of modern brewing in St. Louis".

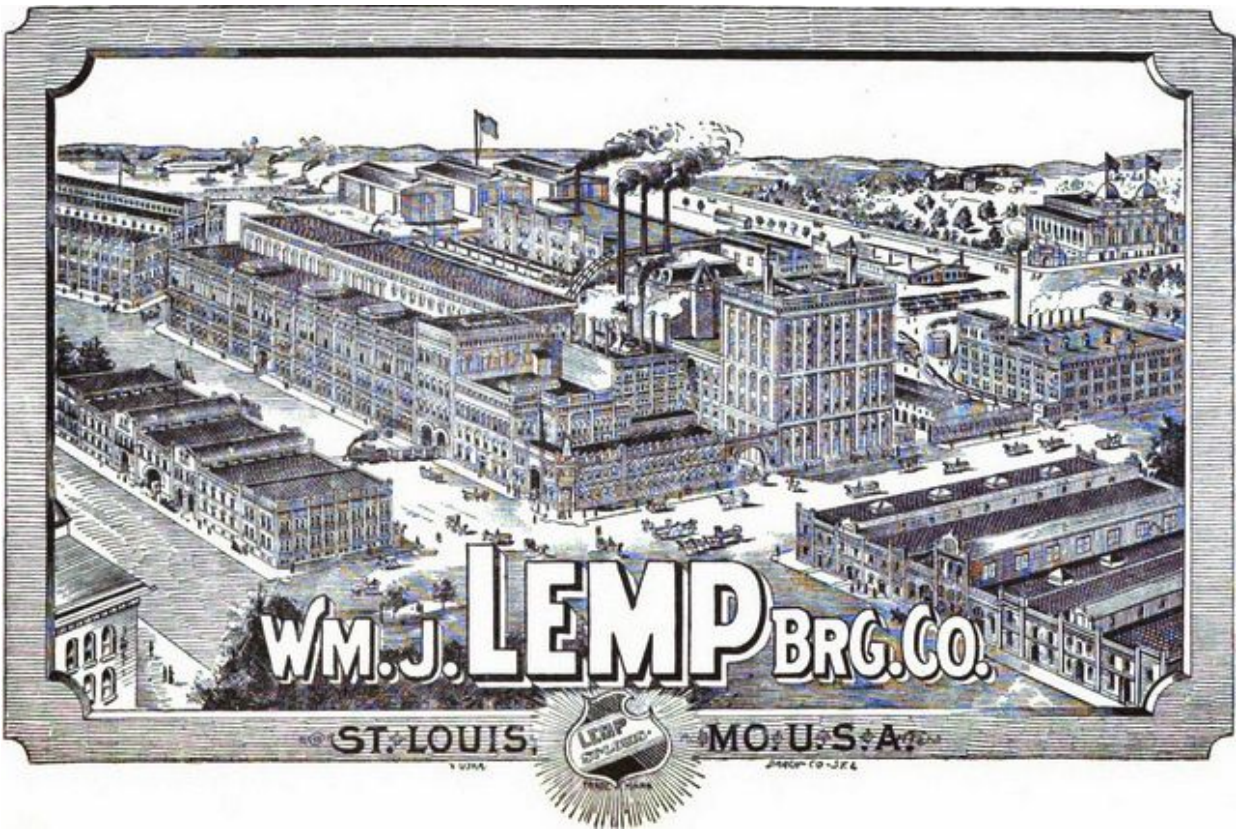

Figure 3.1 The William J. Lemp Brewery.

His son William took over the family business. In 1864, he built a new brewery that he renamed the William J. Lemp Brewing Company, and he expanded and modernized the operations. The giant facility covered five city blocks, and was three stories high with three stories below of cellars and caves. They manufactured a number of beers including Lemp Beer, Pale Ale, Standard, Culmbacher, Tally and Tip Top. William developed a method to refrigerate and transport beer so he could sell it around the nation. He turned the brewery into the third largest in the country, making millions of dollars in sales annually and outselling Anheuser-Busch's Budweiser. Lemp beer

was soon distributed worldwide, and available in Canada, Mexico, England, France, Germany, Japan, and Australia.

William and his wife Julia had a large family with 9 children. In 1876, he bought a mansion near the brewery and turned it into a residence and office. The 33-room house was soon decorated with opulent period furniture, hand-painted ceilings, Italian marble, and carved wood detailing. He even built three massive vaults to house the Lemp's art collection. The mansion was just as impressive underground as it was aboveground. William connected the house to the brewery by tunnels that led from the basement to the caves below. In later years artificial refrigeration was installed in the brewery, so the caves no longer played a role in beer production. This is when William turned the caves into a playground for his family and friends. He built an auditorium, a ballroom, a bowling alley, and a heated swimming pool in the natural caverns beneath the Lemp Mansion.

Figure 3.2 The Lemp Mansion.

In the midst of all of this success, the family's troubles began. In the first of many tragedies, William's son Frederick died of heart failure in 1901 at the age of 28. He had been a hardworking young man, and his family feared that he worked himself to death. "Fred" was his father's favorite, and William's first choice to become his successor. This sad event changed William forever. In his grief he became reclusive and lost interest in his business. Depression set in and his health declined. In 1904, William's closest friend and fellow brewer Frederick Pabst died. Pabst had also been the father-in-law of William's daughter Hilda. His suffering became unbearable. Barely a month later, on February 13, 1904, he ate breakfast and then declared he wasn't feeling well. He retired to his bedroom where he shot himself in the temple with a .38 caliber Smith and Wesson revolver.

The Color Lavender

William Jr. or "Billy" succeeded his father as president of the company. The family business was now in the hands of the third generation of Lemps. However, Billy was born with a silver beer bottle opener in his mouth. As happens so often, the parents earn the money and the children squander it. Billy lived a flamboyant lifestyle, spending his vast fortune on servants, carriages, clothing, and art. He also had the reputation of being a playboy. In 1907, he named the Lemp's most famous beer "Falstaff", after the Shakespearean character Sir John Falstaff, whose philosophy was to "eat, drink, and be merry". Billy was much like this character, a likeable rascal.

Figure 3.3 William "Billy" Lemp Jr.

Billy had someone to help him spend his inheritance, his wife Lillian Handlan. In 1899, he married this belle of St. Louis society who was the daughter of a wealthy manufacturer of railroad supplies. Lillian was nicknamed the "Lavender Lady" for dressing exclusively in that color. It was said that she had a staff of full-time seamstresses to design clothes and accessories in her favorite color, including lavender leather upholstery for her seven carriages. She was reputed to be beautiful but crazy, and she created a sensation wherever she went.

In 1900, Billy and Lillian had a child who they named William Lemp III, but everything went downhill from there. They had a tempestuous marriage that quickly turned into a game. It was said that Billy supplied Lillian with an income of $1,000 per day that she must spend, or she would receive no

more. Billy soon tired of his trophy wife, and filed for divorce in 1908, citing her obsession over the color lavender as the basis for the decision. He accused her of, “the excessive wearing of the color lavender to attract public attention.”

Their scandalous divorce trial and vicious custody dispute were front-page news in all of the local newspapers. The courtroom was a circus that attracted crowds of spectators who were keen for a voyeuristic look at the low class behavior of high society. They were rewarded with salacious tales of drunkenness, infidelity, and excess. Billy accused Lillian of frivolous shopping. He charged her with the use of foul language, drinking, and smoking, and even produced a photo of her smoking a cigarette. This was unseemly behavior for a woman, and it nearly lost her the trial.

Figure 3.4 Lillian Lemp and William Lemp III.

Lillian countered his claims with accounts of Billy's excessive drinking, physical abuse and womanizing. She accused him of drunken debauchery at parties in the caves below the brewery, where prostitutes were brought in as "entertainment" for his friends and himself. On the day of the court's decision, Lillian broke her lavender habit and appeared before the judge dressed entirely in black. The divorce was duly granted and custody of William III given to Lillian. This decision was based on the evidence of a servant who testified that she "found feminine hairs of various colors in William's bathroom while Mrs. Lemp was absent."

The pair returned to court two years later to renew their battle over the custody of their son. Now the accusations turned to violence. Lillian accused Billy of cruelty to animals. A family employee testified that he staged monkey and chicken fights at the brewery, and that William III had watched live birds being fed to monkeys. Lillian also revealed that Billy had a habit of slaughtering the neighborhood cats. He didn't deny this, but instead he admitted that he shot at stray cats when they disturbed his sleep. Lillian also told the courtroom that Billy threatened his employees. If a servant was too slow for his liking, Billy took out his pistol and laid it on a table. At night he slept with the gun under his pillow, aimed at Lillian. Unsurprisingly, the sole custody of William III was awarded to Lillian. In 1915, Billy married Ellie Limberg, the widowed daughter of the late brewer Casper Kohler. Lillian never recovered from the divorce, and retreated from public view. However, the pair are reunited in death as they are buried on either side of their son in the Lemp Mausoleum.

Crying into their Beer

Billy was not the only Lemp to be divorced. His youngest sister Elsa had been the richest heiress in St. Louis when in 1901 she married Thomas Wright, the president of the More-Jones Brass and Metal Company. The marriage was an unhappy one. Elsa filed for divorce in 1919 and it was granted that very day. She avoided the drama that had surrounded her brother's trial, and she stated simply that her husband had "destroyed her peace and happiness". To the surprise of her family, the couple reconciled in 1920 and remarried in New York. However, it wasn't much of a honeymoon, as Elsa suffered from indigestion, nausea, and insomnia.

Eleven days later, Elsa was still lying in bed while Thomas was drawing a bath. He suddenly heard a gunshot and ran into their bedroom. He found Elsa bathed in a pool of blood. She had shot herself in the heart and within minutes she died from her wounds. Thomas didn't report her death for hours and there was no suicide note, so some suspected foul play. However, the inquest decided she had committed suicide as a result of ongoing depression because her baby girl Patricia had died six years before on the day she was born. When Billy discovered that his little sister had killed herself he announced flatly, "That's the Lemp family for you."

By now, Billy was undergoing his own bout of depression. His mother had died of cancer a few years before, and the company experienced difficult financial times during World War II. Also, a number of local breweries had combined to form the Independent Breweries Company, becoming serious competition for the Lemp Brewery. That is, until they were all affected by the introduction of Prohibition on January 16, 1919. The Eighteenth Amendment outlawed the manufacture, sale, and transportation of intoxicating liquors. Like other companies, the Lemp Brewery converted to brewing a non-alcoholic malt beverage called Cerva. The initial sales were successful, but "near beer" never reached the popularity or profitability of beer. The brewery also manufactured ice; meanwhile they hoped in vain that Congress would repeal the law.

Prohibition saw the downfall of the Lemp dynasty. The individual members of the family were all independently wealthy, and Billy didn't see a reason to keep the company going. Unlike his father and grandfather, Billy never kept up with technological advancements. The Temperance movement had been gaining ground for awhile, and when the ban was finally enforced, Billy simply gave up. One day, without announcement, he closed the brewery for good. When his workers arrived that morning, they found the doors and gates locked shut. He sold the famous Falstaff trademark and the brewery. At the height of the Lemp's success the buildings were worth 7 million dollars. In 1922, Billy sold the buildings at auction for a mere $585,000. (In 1992, they sold again for $200,000.)

Billy became even more depressed after he sold off his legacy. He was now 68 years old, and he complained constantly of sickness and headaches.

However, he seemed to rally and even planned an extended holiday in Europe. However, this was not to be. On December 9, 1922, Billy spoke to his wife on the phone from his office, as though nothing was wrong. Then he unbuttoned his vest and shot himself in the heart with a .38 caliber revolver, in the same room where his father had committed suicide eighteen years earlier. When William III learned of the news, he admitted, "I was afraid this was coming." Billy would never know that Prohibition would be revoked in 1933, and that companies such as Anheuser-Busch would recover from their losses. Likewise, William III tried to revive the business after Prohibition was repealed in 1933. He started the William J. Lemp brewing Co., but within two years the company went bankrupt. In 1943, he died of a heart attack at the age of forty-two.

Billy's younger brother Charles had left the Lemp Mansion and the family business to go into banking, finance and politics. After Billy's untimely death, Charles moved back into the family home. There he lived a reclusive lifestyle with only his dog and two servants, an elderly married couple. It is said that he had developed a germ phobia and wore gloves to avoid contact with bacteria. In 1941, Charles sent a strange letter to a St. Louis funeral home, specifying that in the event of death his remains should be taken by ambulance to the Missouri Cemetery. His body should not be bathed or clothed, but cremated immediately. His ashes were to be placed in a box and stored on his farm. There would be no funeral or notice in the newspapers. On May 10, 1949, Charles became the fourth victim of the family curse. Concerned that no one would take care of his Doberman pinscher when he was gone, he shot his dog in the basement of the home, and then shot himself in the head. Charles was the only Lemp to leave a suicide note, which read, "In case I am found dead, blame it on no one but me."

Edwin Lemp was the last surviving heir of Adam Lemp and he sold the Lemp mansion after Charles's death. He didn't work for the family company and he shied away from the public. Instead, he built Cragwold, a mansion alongside the Meramec River in Kirkwood, which still exists today. Edwin died in 1970 at the age of 90. His final wish was that his butler should burn the family's documents, art collection and family heirlooms, supposedly to end the curse that had haunted his family, or because they had something to hide. Along with most of his brothers and sisters, Edwin was buried in the

family mausoleum in Bellefontaine Cemetery. After four generations, none of the Lemp family remains, although some believe their spirits still remain in the family home.

Spirits and Boos

When Edwin sold the Lemp mansion in 1949 it was turned into a boarding house. The old building deteriorated, along with the surrounding neighborhood. The rooms were not very popular with tenants, and rumors began to circulate that it was haunted. Richard Pointer and his family rescued the house in 1975 and restored it to its former glory. The ghost stories intensified during the restoration of the building. Tradespeople were subjected to a range of paranormal activity, including the sounds of screams, gunshots, laughs, cries, and disembodied voices calling out their names. Apparently, these experiences were harrowing enough to lead a few workers to quit, such as the painter who stayed the night and heard horse's hooves on cobblestone, although he couldn't find the horses. Incredibly, cobblestones were later discovered just inches beneath the grass.

The Lemp Mansion now serves as a bed & breakfast. They have a restaurant with a menu featuring classic dishes such as Beef Wellington, Chicken A la Orange, and flaming Bananas Foster for dessert, prepared tableside. Dinner guests swap ghost stories with each other and the wait staff. Daring diners are invited to ghost hunt at any time, while haunted tours are operated every Monday night. Tour guide, amateur historian, and psychic Betsy Burnett-Belanger says that the Lemp Mansion is one of the country's most haunted places, and home to at least seven ghosts. Their motto is, "The Lemp Mansion is famous from ghost to ghost!"

Betsy said that every room is haunted, but the most haunted sections are the stairway, attic and basement, known to the staff as the "Gates of Hell". This used to be the entrance to the caves, which are now disused and the hidden passageway has been sealed shut. Betsy revealed that visitors report a wide range of ghostly phenomena at the mansion, including strange knocking sounds and phantom footsteps, doors that inexplicably lock and unlock, while lights switch themselves on and off. A piano plays by itself, and strange voices and whispers are heard. Overnight guests claim to be awakened by the sensation of someone stroking their hair, in a comforting

manner. Others report that furniture or their personal belongings have moved, or simply disappeared. Some detect the presence of cold spots at the sites of the suicides that occurred in the Mansion. Visitors often experience inexplicable feelings of panic, nausea, depression and dread, and a sense of being watched or touched. Poltergeist activity takes place in the bar where drinks stir themselves, and glasses lift off the bar then fly through the air, smashing as they hit the ground.

In the dining room one night a waitress saw a man dressed in old-fashioned clothes seated at a table. She asked him, “Would you like some coffee?” but he simply vanished. This is known as the Atrium Room, or the “Jungle Room” for its forest mural, as this room once had a glass dome and housed exotic plants and birds. Some people have heard and seen phantom birds, cats and other animals, and it is thought that the Lemp family even had a zoo in the caves. People claim to hear a phantom dog barking or panting, or they feel a friendly dog brushing up against them. This is believed to be the ghost of Charles’s unfortunate dog. Charles has also been seen about the mansion, wearing a business suit and shiny shoes, or a top hat and cape. Betsy told us that during the mansion’s days as a boarding house, a girl was murdered there, although Charles’s ghost witnessed the incident. Charles is also said to make his presence felt via smell. In a 2010 episode of the television show Ghost Hunters, investigators Jason Hawes and Grant Wilson encounter an unbearable odor of sewage in one of the rooms. They believe this fetid stench to be a warning from Charles, and his ghostly way of ordering them to “get out!”

Figure 3.5 A portrait of Lillian Lemp, the “Lavender Lady”.

The ghosts of other family members have allegedly been spotted. The second floor and third floor rooms have been converted into guest suites. Betsy said that the apparition of Lillian Lemp glides through these rooms and halls, wearing her customary lavender-colored dress. The Lavender Lady's portrait hangs in the dining room, and when people walk past it, some claim to smell the strong scent of lavender. In the office where her former husband Billy committed suicide, a number of male visitors have reported being “violently pushed” out of the room by his ghost. Even from beyond the grave this Lothario still likes the ladies, and he plants a spectral kiss on the cheeks of women who look like Lillian. Reputedly, Billy makes appearances in the women's restroom where he peeks at them over the stalls!

According to legend, Billy’s illicit affairs led to the birth of an illegitimate son. This child was born to either a servant girl he romanced, or was the

result of a forbidden union with a prostitute. It is believed that the boy was physically disabled, and out of the family's shame he was hidden in the attic, away from the public eye. Apparently, he was confined to such a small space that he grew hunched over, just like a monkey, so he is called "Monkey Face Boy" or "Monkey Boy". Betsy told us another version of the story, whereby William Sr. and Julia had a little-known tenth child, a boy named Zeke who was born with Down syndrome. They were under pressure to institutionalize him, so they hid him in the attic and the servants raised him. The unfortunate son died in the 1940s at age 16, or age 30, depending upon whether he is attributed to Billy or William Senior. Monkey Boy is said to haunt the attic, and neighbors have seen an "ape-like child", often with glowing red eyes, peering at them from the attic windows. People claim to have heard him call out, "Help me!" or "Come play with me", as he seeks the love and attention he never received in life. Visitors leave toys for the little boy, and discover later that they have been moved, as though his ghost had played with them.

Beer Goggles

The Lemp Mansion has been popularly haunted ever since it was profiled in a 1980 issue of Life magazine in the article "Terrifying Tales of 9 Haunted Houses". However, there are many possible natural explanations for the supernatural claims. As long as there are plausible possibilities that have not been disproved, we cannot jump to paranormal conclusions. For example, the phantom footsteps and doors that open and close may be attributed to changes in pressure, stress, weight and temperature in the old house. The lights switching on and off could be caused by old, deteriorating light fixtures, faulty wiring, or it may be an unconscious move to switch a light off as one leaves the room. As for the nasty smells, pipes in old places can become dry, or gases can become trapped in them, and the odor can rise through the vents. Jason and Grant from Ghost Hunters are plumbers by trade, so it is surprising that they didn't investigate these possibilities!

Many of the ghost stories change over time, as legends do. The story of the painter hearing horse hooves on cobblestone is now retold as a psychic who heard horses neighing, and that a tethering lot was later discovered on the grounds. Many of the tales come from Betsy, who often claims they come straight from the ghosts via dowsing rods. However, dowsing rods are

powered by unconscious behavior known as the ideomotor effect, and not paranormal forces. This is the same phenomenon behind Ouija boards and water witching. Moreover, Betsy's ghost tales usually contradict the written history of the Lemp Mansion. By digging into the history of the Lemp family, many of the popular ghost claims can be dismissed.

The sad saga of "Monkey Boy" can be traced back to Betsy's tours and her psychic revelations. The story is suspicious because there are multiple versions of the story. In some accounts Billy was said to have fathered the child with his mother or sister! Monkey Boy also seems to be a cautionary tale against the dangers of infidelity. It is unlikely that neighbors could see him peering out of the window, as the attic faces a parking lot and a grove of trees. At any rate, there is no proof of the existence of Monkey Boy. The child was supposedly buried in the Bellefontaine Cemetery in an unmarked grave. There is no record of him here, although there is a child's grave marked only with the name "LEMP". This is the final resting place of Elsa's baby Patricia who was born and died on August 8, 1914.

Figure 3.6 The final home of the Lemp family, the Lemp Mausoleum in Bellefontaine Cemetery.

It is also possible that Monkey Boy is a conflation of this little known death in the Lemp family; combined with the facts that he kept monkeys for fighting, and had a reputation as a womanizer. At any rate, an illegitimate child would have been exposed during the mud-slinging divorce proceedings between Billy and Lillian. As for the scent of lavender surrounding the portrait of the Lavender Lady, why would Billy have displayed a painting of his ex-wife in the home when he had married a second time? As it turns out, the portrait is not original to the family, but was painted by artist May Pratt Alsop during the Pointer's restoration in the late 1970s, more than a decade after Lillian's death. It is also doubtful that Lillian haunts the Lemp Mansion because she never lived in the house! During their ten-year marriage, Billy and Lillian lived together in a home on 3322 South Thirteenth Street.

May Pratt Alsop also painted the misleading jungle-themed mural on the walls of the Atrium Room. It is said that this room was once filled with exotic birds and plants. This belief is supported by claims that people hear phantom birds and the sounds of other animals. However, the Lemp Mansion was a home that doubled as an office, it was not an aviary or a zoo. It appears that this story is conflated with the history of Edwin's mansion Cragwold. Edwin was the Lemp with a love of nature and a passion for exotic animals. His house was designed around a central atrium that he filled with tropical plants and rare birds. Edwin used his estate as an exotic animal farm and a licensed Federal Game Farm. He bought, sold, and traded animals with many zoos around the country, especially with the St. Louis Zoo. He maintained a menagerie of exotic animals, and among his collection he kept antelope, water buffalo, llamas, emus, sacred cattle from India, Siberian yaks, peacocks, and parrots. Incidentally, Edwin didn't destroy the family heirlooms. He donated many of them, including Adam Lemp's first brewkettle that he gave to the Missouri Historical Society in 1955.

Was there a Lemp family curse? If there was any "curse", it was surely that depression plagued the family. Prohibition and World War II affected many brewing families. In fact, suicides by prominent St. Louis German-Americans were so notorious that the St. Louis police department dubbed it "the Dutch Act". Patrick Henry Nolan was vice-president and general manager of the Mutual Brewing Company of St. Louis. The company suffered financial problems during WWII, and Patrick committed suicide at

the brewery the night before his scheduled appearance in bankruptcy court. Otto Stifel of the Union Brewery was the next to take his own life. He shot himself in the mouth in 1920, after losing much of his inheritance to Prohibition. August A. Busch of the Anheuser-Busch was another suicide victim. He struggled to keep the family business going during Prohibition, and managed to see its repeal. However, the strain had been too much for him, and in 1934 he took his own life.

When people visit the Lemp Mansion today, they often feel a sense of sorrow or depression. This is unsurprising because the house's morbid history is well known. As the scene of suicide and sadness, the house is stereotyped as being haunted, and the violent deaths seen as explanation for the alleged hauntings. The gloomy ambiance affects people too. This is a Victorian home that hasn't been renovated since the 1970s. It is a musty-smelling, dusty, dimly lit house filled with old furniture, Lemp Brewery memorabilia and personal items once owned by the Lemp family, because they were not destroyed. The house is also filled with the imagination of visitors who allow themselves to get into the “spirit” of the Lemp Mansion's macabre past.

Chapter 4

The Myrtles Plantation

There is an old Southern saying that "when a Louisianan goes to Heaven and finds there's no gumbo, he comes right back." Louisiana has the reputation of being very haunted. New Orleans is believed to be the most haunted city in America, although the "most haunted house" in the country isn't even in the Big Easy. The famed Myrtles Plantation resides in the tiny town of St. Francisville, about 30 miles north of Baton Rouge. This beautiful antebellum home is said to be the scene of mystery, misfortune and murder, and its story is as long and winding as the Mississippi River that snakes past the estate.

Originally called Laurel Grove, General David Bradford built the house in 1796. A lawyer and deputy attorney general, "Whiskey Dave" was better known as one of the ringleaders in the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794. This was a protest against an excise tax levied on farmers who distilled and sold whiskey. When the fledgling U.S. government tried to quell the resistance, David fled Pennsylvania. Leaving his family behind he traveled along the Mississippi River to Bayou Sara in West Florida, as it was then known. Louisiana was still Spanish territory, so he was safe from George Washington's army. He lived alone in the little house for several years, until he received a pardon from President John Adams in 1799. His wife and children joined him at Laurel Grove shortly thereafter, which soon became a successful plantation that grew indigo and cotton.

During these quieter years, David took students of law into his home. One of these boarders was a man named Clark Woodruff, who fell in love with David's daughter Sara Mathilda. They married, and had three children, Cornelia Gale, James, and Mary Octavia. When the General died in 1808, Judge Clark Woodruff took over the property. In the coming years tragedy struck the Woodruff family, and Clark lost his wife and two of their children. Legend says that a slave named Chloe poisoned them.

In 1834, Clark sold Laurel Grove to Ruffin Grey Stirling. The Scotsman and his wife Mary Cobb renovated and expanded the house, nearly doubling the

size of the original building. They renamed it The Myrtles, after the pink crepe myrtle trees that bloom around the grounds. When Stirling died in 1854, his son-in-law William Drew Winter managed the plantation. This arrangement only lasted a few years, until William was shot under mysterious circumstances. The Myrtles has changed hands many times over hundreds of years, and these are just some of the people who lived and died here, although it is said that some of them never left.

Figure 4.1 The Myrtles Plantation.

The Myrtles Plantation is set in a grove of live oaks draped with Spanish moss, and dotted with vibrant crepe myrtles. It is now a bed & breakfast, although not your typical guesthouse as they serve ghosts with their grits and biscuits. That is, if you can last the entire night. The gift shop sells voodoo dolls, jambalaya mix, coffee with chicory, and a t-shirt that issues a challenge to the brave, “Can you survive a night at the Myrtles Plantation?” According to the staff, the place is so haunted that many guests leave before the night is over.

Boo on the Bayou

Louisiana has a number of surviving Native American cemeteries known as burial mounds. The Myrtles is allegedly built on one such sacred burial ground of the Tunica people. According to legend, General Bradford carelessly cleared the land, piled the dead aside, and burned their remains so he could build his fancy house. As a result of his disrespectful behavior, a curse was placed on the land. This is believed to be the cause of the bad luck that plagues the families who live there. It is also the apparent reason that the plantation is such a hotspot of paranormal activity. One of the most commonly spotted ghosts is the spirit of a beautiful Native American maiden who sunbathes naked by the pond.

It is said that ten grisly murders took place at The Myrtles, and many more deaths, so it is believed that there are at least ten resident ghosts, although several sources claim that there are hundreds of restless spirits. The Myrtles brags that it is registered on the Smithsonian's list of haunted houses, which names the plantation as the "most haunted place" in America. The plantation operates Mystery Tours on Friday and Saturday nights during which they share the most famous ghost stories. If you're lucky you'll get shown around by Miss Hester, who has been working at The Myrtles for "thirty some years", and knows all of the stories and has had many encounters herself. The guides recount an astonishing array of paranormal phenomena, including the ghosts of several soldiers from the Civil War. A wounded Confederate soldier once dragged himself into the house before he died. He left a bloodstain on the floor where he fell that cannot be removed.

According to the tour guides, many guests hear the sound of phantom footsteps on the main staircase in the house. This is believed to be the path that William Drew Winter took as he was in the throes of death. On the evening of January 26, 1871, William was teaching Sunday school when a man appeared on horseback and said he had business with the attorney. He approached the stranger, who then shot him in the chest and rode off into the night. With incredible effort, William stumbled into the house, and staggered up the stairs. He managed to reach the seventeenth step before he collapsed into his wife's arms and died. His labored footsteps are often heard on the stairs, where he relives his death nightly.

Figure 4.2 The stairs that William Winter climbed to his death.

The ghosts are a mixture of mischievous and benevolent. One naughty ghost rumples the bed sheets, steals bars of soap and rearranges guests' belongings

as they sleep. Another ghost has a foot fetish, and massages people's feet or bandages their feet while they lie in bed. To thwart these mischievous ghosts, a good ghost smooths the sheets, tucks guests into bed and tidies their rooms when they are asleep. However, this ghost is a little obsessive compulsive. The 1985 television movie *Long Hot Summer* starring Don Johnson and Cybil Shepherd was filmed at the Myrtles. The film crew reported that when they moved furniture to shoot a scene, someone, or something, would move it back to its original place.

Y'all Come Back Now

They may be dead but they are still Southerners, so if you appeal to their politeness and ask them kindly to cease their shenanigans, these well-mannered Southern ghosts will generally comply. However, one grumpy ghost doesn't know the meaning of Southern hospitality. This gentleman wears white overalls and a straw hat and blocks visitors as they try to enter the driveway. He orders them to leave, and shouts abuse at them until they drive away. However, we can forgive him because he was the former caretaker who was murdered in the 1920s. The Carriage House restaurant is reportedly haunted by a poltergeist. Dinner guests have witnessed paintings on the walls shake while they enjoy their fried catfish; while bartenders have seen wine glasses fly across the bar and smash into the wall. In the house, doors and windows are slammed, and doorknobs are rattled. An episode of the television show *Ghost Hunters* captures a lamp that glides spookily across a side table.

Inanimate objects develop a life of their own at The Myrtles. White rocking chairs sitting on the wrap-around veranda rock back and forth by themselves. A grand piano plays by itself, the invisible pianist striking the same chord again and again. When the room is checked, the music stops suddenly, but resumes again once the intruder leaves. A ghostly woman dances to music that no one else can hear, as she floats a foot off the floor. In portraits found around the house, the expressions of the subjects change from happy to sad, while statues in the garden weep tears. People catch the smell of a cigar, or perfume scented with honeysuckle or rose. Some visitors feel a tap on the shoulder, or a tug at their shirt or pants as though someone is trying to get

their attention. People occasionally experience the distressing sensation of being smothered or choked when they are in the house.

Other visitors hear the cries of a ghostly baby, children singing old nursery rhymes, and a woman reciting the Lord's Prayer. Some hear their name being called by a disembodied voice, or during the ball seasons of spring and fall the sounds of phantom parties can be heard. Spectral slaves appear and ask guests if they have any chores that need to be completed. The ghost of a young girl only appears when a thunderstorm approaches, while another ghost girl peers out of the windows wistfully. A woman wanders from room to room searching for someone she never finds. Carrying a night candle, she peers into people's faces when they lie in bed. Of course, no Louisiana ghost story is without Voodoo, and so a Voodoo priestess is seen practicing her craft on guests as they sleep.

Down Home Cooking

Chloe is the most famous ghost at the Myrtles Plantation, and her tale is a tragic one. She had been a house servant for the Woodruff family, where she cooked, cleaned and cared for the children. Judge Clark Woodruff was married to David Bradford's daughter, although he had the reputation of being a philanderer. He took female slaves as his concubines, and Chloe was one of his reluctant lovers. However, Clark soon tired of her and took another mistress.

Chloe developed the habit of eavesdropping on Clark's private conversations through the keyhole to his office door. Some say Chloe was scared that now she had been rejected would be sent to work in the fields, where the labor was backbreaking under the relentless sun. Perhaps Chloe sought to increase her power and was gathering information to blackmail him. As the story goes, Chloe overheard Clark talking with a client about a private matter and he caught her in the act of snooping. Some say she saw him with another woman, or that his wife caught him with Chloe. Her punishment was severe. He cut off her left ear. From that day on, an embarrassed Chloe wore a green turban to cover her disfigurement.

Soon, she hatched a plan for seeking revenge, or maybe she was trying to get back onto Clark's good side. It was Cornelia Gale's birthday, and Chloe

baked a special cake, laced with the poisonous juice of oleander leaves. She served it up to the family, but Clark was out of town, so he didn't eat any of the cake. The most popular theory is that Chloe hoped to make the family ill, but not too ill. She wanted to nurse them back to health, and prove her worth. Maybe she hoped to administer a magical cure. Her grandmother had been a Voodoo priestess, and she had taught Chloe some curses and cures, including how to make poison from the oleander plant. However, Chloe miscalculated the ingredients. Mrs. Woodruff and the two little girls became very sick from eating the cake. After a few days of writhing in agony from the effects of the poison, they died. A less charitable theory is that Chloe was a jealous mistress, who wanted her competition out of the way.

Chloe ran to the safety of her fellow slaves, but fearing reprisal from their master, they took matters into their own hands. A mob dragged her outside and hanged her from an oak tree in the front yard of the plantation. They weighted her body with rocks and tossed her into the Mississippi River. To this day, Chloe is believed to be hanging around the home. Her ghost roams the grounds, still wearing her green turban, and making her presence felt. Her cheeky ghost has been known to steal earrings from female guests when they are in the ladies' parlor. The staff finds earrings around the house, but only single earrings, because Chloe only had one ear. She has also been known to pilfer colorful hair ribbons from little girls and steal lipsticks from female guests.

The murders created a number of other ghosts. The two Woodruff girls are seen wearing hoop skirts, with their long golden hair, playing on the grounds. They are often spotted on rainy days. When people drive onto the property they are surprised to see two little girls playing on the lawn, untouched by the rain. Sometimes the precocious girls chat with the guests. Strangely, their faces have also been seen in the crystal chandeliers. Their father also haunts the house. Clark Woodruff's portrait hangs in the ladies' parlor, and his eyes follow you wherever you are in the room.

Figure 4.3 The “haunted mirror” at The Myrtles.

One of the most popular attractions in the house is the haunted mirror. Superstition dictates that at the time of death all the mirrors in the home should be shrouded with a black cloth to prevent the spirits of the deceased from being trapped in the mirror. However, when Mrs. Woodruff and her two girls died, there was so much confusion that one of the mirrors was left uncovered. As a result, the souls of the murdered victims are imprisoned in the mirror. The spirits manifest themselves in its surface, where their faces and handprints appear. These images can't be washed away, and although the glass has been replaced the images reappear in the mirror.

Not only is there much anecdotal evidence to support the ghost claims, but there is proof. In 1992, current owner Teeta Moss took a photograph of the house for insurance purposes. However, the company rejected it, explaining that she must resubmit a photo of the premises without a person in the image. Teeta was confused, as there was no one there when she took the picture. A staff member examined the photo and realized that there is a shadowy figure between the house and the gift shop that appears to be wearing a turban. This photo is believed to have captured the ghost of Chloe.

Gone with the Wind

Some digging into the history of the plantation reveals that the incidents behind the ghost stories didn't quite happen that way, or didn't happen at all. There was a village and burial ground of the Tunica people in the area from 1731 to 1764. This is known as the Trudeau Landing site and it is about 30 miles north of the plantation in modern West Feliciana Parish. The Tunica people occupied this area before they migrated south, although they never inhabited Bayou Sara, so The Myrtles was not built on a Native American burial mound.

Rusty brown and grey streaks and blobs can indeed be seen in the famous mirror. The tour guides say that the marks won't wash off, although by looking at the mirror it can be seen that they aren't on the surface. The guides claim that the glass in the mirror has been replaced, and yet the markings remain. The marks look as though they were caused by improper resilvering, causing a kind of unintentional distressed-look. However, the mirror may not have been treated, and the marks may be the result of deterioration from humidity or mishandling.

Some people interpret the shapes as the faces and hands of Sarah Woodruff and her daughters who are trapped in the mirror. In an episode of *Ghost Hunters*, investigators Jason Hawes and Grant Wilson inspect the mirror and explain this as "matrixing", the mind's tendency to find familiar images in random patterns (although this phenomenon is better known as pareidolia). Despite this debunking, The Myrtles still promotes the story that is presented as the climax of the tour. Most damningly, the mirror was not even in the house during the Woodruff deaths. It is not a piece that is original to the home, but was purchased by former owners the Ward family, who refurbished the home with period furniture during the 1970s.

The *Ghost Hunters* squashed one myth but created another. In the "very haunted" slave shack Jason and Grant held a stake out monitored by IR security cameras. When the team analyzed the footage later they discovered that over a period of four and a half minutes, a lamp slowly glides fourteen inches across a side table. Grant is sitting in a chair beside the table, off camera, and he denies snagging the cord with his foot and dragging it by accident. The next day, the team revisits the room and attempts to recreate the occurrence. Unlike the footage, the tablecloth bunches up when the lamp is pulled during the test. They "couldn't find another explanation", so they conclude, "we had to attribute the phenomenon to a supernatural force. In other words, the place was haunted".

However, there is another explanation; that the incident was a hoax. In examining the footage, at the beginning of the scene the lamp cord is pulled towards the wall and runs under a picture frame, yet by the end of the scene the cord is pulled suspiciously towards Grant, and his chair has moved closer to the table. Four minutes is ample time for him to have slowly pulled the lamp across the table. Furthermore, the tablecloth seen during the recreation is a lace doily, while the tablecloth in the footage appears to be of solid material *covering* the doily, providing an even surface for the lamp to glide along. If this had been a paranormal event the evidence would have been remarkable. Even Miss Hester said, "I've seen a lot of things but nothing like this!" Incidentally, the "slave shack" is the caretaker's cottage that never housed slaves.

We were shown the haunted staircase where the mortally wounded William Drew Winter allegedly climbs to the seventeenth step as he relives his murder. This is one of the few stories grounded in historical fact, although his murder didn't quite happen that way. One January 26, 1871, William was teaching a Sunday school class when he heard someone outside calling his name. He went out to the front galley and there a man named E. S. Webber shot him, according to the newspapers. William's family heard the shooting, followed by the sound of horse's hooves. However, he didn't stagger up seventeen steps to die in the arms of his beloved. William dropped dead where he was shot. Further research reveals that ten murders did not occur at The Myrtles. William Drew Winter's death is the only verifiable murder at the plantation.

The Ghost Menagerie

Fellow investigator Matthew Baxter and I examined the photograph from The Myrtles website which is also available as a postcard in their gift shop. We located the site where the picture was taken and recreated the image to see if the proportions would line up to the photo. I positioned myself right where "Chloe" has been, standing on the wooden veranda between the gift shop and the main house. Matthew stood where the photographer had been and took a photograph of me. The resulting photograph showed that the height, width and shape of the figure in the Chloe photo is of human proportions. The most probable answer is that it was a person, statue or similar object, and there are too many natural explanations to suspect the supernatural.

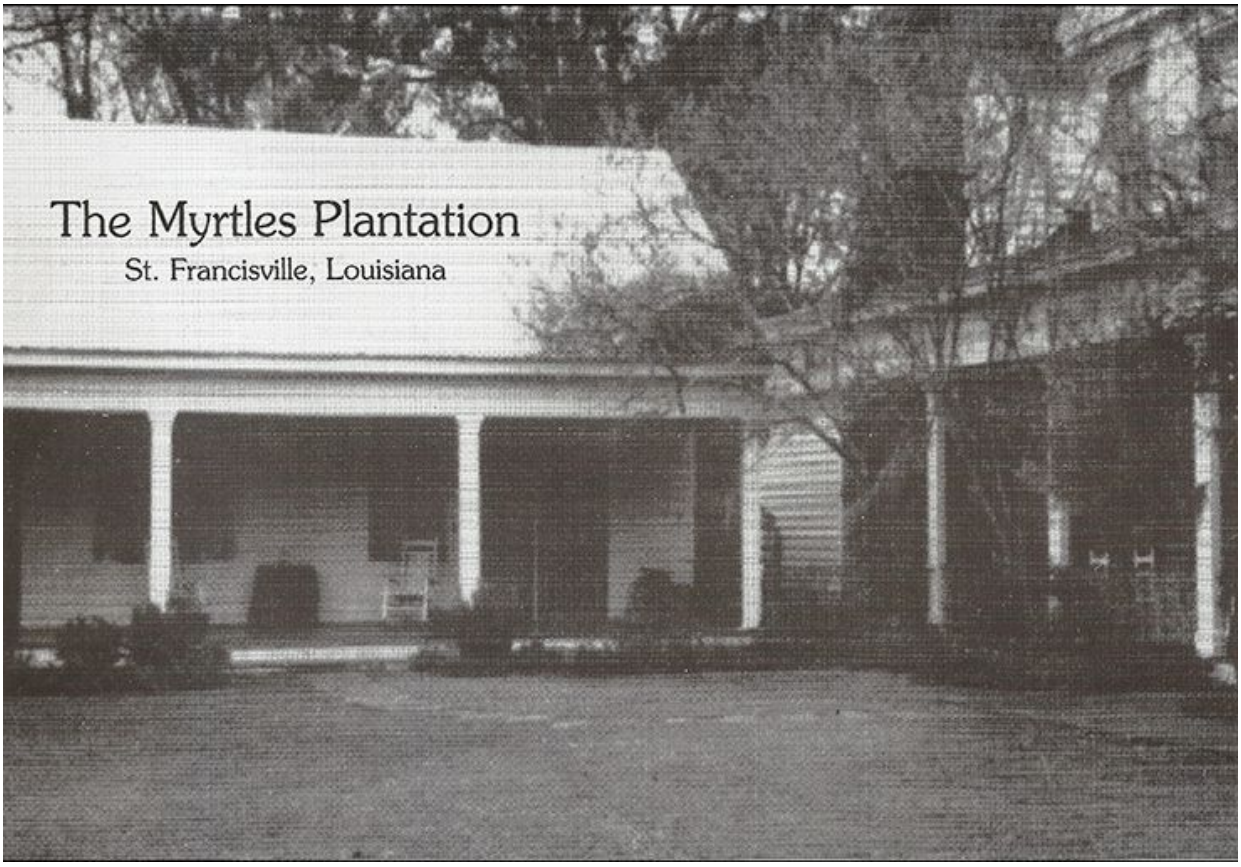

Figure 4.4 The Myrtles Plantation postcard believed to show the ghost of "Chloe".

The tour guides claim that the Smithsonian Institution (or MIT, the FBI or National Geographic) conducted "shadow density analysis" (which doesn't exist) on the photo (taken in 1992, 1993 or 1995) to prove that it isn't faked or enhanced in any way. The only copy available for viewing is a postcard that is severely degraded in quality. This is due to the printing process that reduces it to a halftone pattern, creating an immense loss of data. As it stands, the photo cannot be analyzed because there is no detail anymore. The tour guides claim that the owner has the original "under lock and key", but it is suspicious that they are unwilling to produce this photo that would possibly contain the information needed to either verify or debunk the claims. At any rate, a query to the Smithsonian Institution received the following reply from Barbara McBride. "The Smithsonian does not maintain a list of haunted houses nor does it authenticate photographs of ghosts."

Figure 4.5 Replicating the "ghost" of Chloe photo.

Most significantly, this photo did not capture the ghost of Chloe because she never existed. The tour guide argued that Chloe did exist because the owner discovered "Clark Woodruff's diary in which he spoke about how pretty Chloe was". I was told that a copy of this document is kept at the West Feliciana Parish library and that this is yet another original document that the owner keeps "under lock and key". However, I visited the library and was assisted in my research by archivist Debbie who confirmed that no such diary exists. West Feliciana Parish Court archives also fail to substantiate the existence of Chloe.

Moreover, Sarah and her two children did not die of poisoning by an oleander-laced birthday cake. There was a yellow fever epidemic in the area during the 1820s, and Sara contracted the illness and died in July 1823. Two of her children died too, however, it was not her two daughters. Her only son James died of yellow fever in July 1824, while Cornelia succumbed to the

same illness in September of that year. After their deaths, Clark moved to New Orleans with his remaining child Mary. He lived there until his death in 1851, while his daughter lived to the age of 71. Clark Woodruff's name has been much maligned by modern mythmakers. He never remarried after Sarah died, and to accuse him of being a womanizer and a murderer amounts to supernatural slander.

Bless Her Heart!

How did The Myrtles Plantation develop its haunted reputation? A plantation that is well over 200 years old will always be a breeding ground for ghost stories, with a history of slavery, the Civil War, and the trials and tribulations of the many families who lived and died there. A reference to The Myrtles in *Louisiana: A Guide to the State* (1941) appears to be the earliest documentation of its ghosts, about four decades before the place became a tourist attraction. "Several ghost stories are centered around the Myrtles. One concerns a little French lady in a green bonnet. She is reputed to make nocturnal visits to the guest room, lifting the mosquito bar and peering at the occupant of the bed. Another story tells of the ghost of an infant, who returns to its death chamber and cries throughout the night, or until a lighted lamp is brought into the room." The book clearly tells these tales as folklore, not fact, and the modern ghost stories are clear elaborations of these original tales.

Dolor and Marjorie Munson Michaud owned The Myrtles between the years 1955-1978. The couple heard the legends from the locals, and these were passed down to subsequent owners, most notably a couple from California named Frances and James Kermeen Myers. Frances embraced and embellished these stories, claiming that she had been mysteriously "chosen" by unseen forces as the Plantation's next owner, and that she witnessed the ghost of Mrs. Michaud. The couple soon realized that the supernatural sells, and they opened a guesthouse with their ghostly gimmick. The Myrtles appeared as number six on the list of "Terrifying Tales of Nine Haunted Houses" in a 1980 issue of *Life* magazine. Most of the modern ghost stories originate from this time period.

In 2002, Frances Kermeen published *The Myrtles Plantation: The True Story of America's Most Haunted House*. Like other books and movies that purport

to be “true”, this isn’t. Frances refers to *The Amityville Horror: A True Story* throughout her book, and her claims appear to be heavily influenced by *Amityville*, *The Exorcist*, and other titles from this era. Frances’s book is a sensationalized account of her life in the house during the 1980s. It chronicles many far-fetched anecdotes of paranormal activity, including beds rising in the air, paintings that fly across the room, and guests who are raped by ghosts. During her time in the house, Frances’s husband Jim was unfaithful with several women, including a member of staff. She blames his infidelity on the cursed house, and speculates that the spirit of the philandering Judge Clark Woodruff possessed Jim. Some of the ghost stories come from the ghosts themselves.

The legend of Chloe stems from the oral history that emerged during Frances’s ownership. According to her book, she encountered the ghost, and so did a psychic who visited the house in the 1980s and discerned that her name was “Chloe”. Jim was conducting a tour when he noticed the psychic woman “talking to space. She told him that when they were in the gentleman’s parlor she felt dizzy, then confused, as she seemed to be in a different time. She heard a woman crying in the French bedroom, so she went to investigate, still trapped in this other realm. She found a mulatto slave dressed in a green frock with a green turban wrapped around her head whimpering in the corner, so she went over to comfort her, asking her name and how she could help. The slave told her that her name was Chloe.”

Since this time, the “ghost” has been referred to as Chloe, Cloey, Cleo or Clio. That she is a legend is revealed not only by the many different stories about her, but the variations of her descriptions. Chloe is often reported to be petite and beautiful, whereas Kermeen and the psychic describe her less poetically as a “large, homely woman with a square jaw” in her fifties. According to Frances, Chloe wasn’t a slave but was “a descendent of slaves”. Other sources say she was a mulatto woman. Frances says that the ear-chopping incident occurred before Chloe arrived at The Myrtles. Another source says that she wore a turban to cover her head because *both* of her ears had been cut off. In a version that predates the modern stories, the ghost was said to be that of a French governess who lost an ear due to frostbite while working in Canada. Over time, Chloe has been described variously as wearing a green turban, tignon, handkerchief, scarf, bonnet or

beret, depending on whether she is portrayed as being a slave, a mulatto or a French woman.

The Myrtles Plantation: The True Story of America's Most Haunted House is the source of most popular ghost stories associated with The Myrtles today, including the phantom footsteps and haunted piano. However, the current owners do not endorse her book. During my visit to the plantation the tour guide said with a sniff, "We don't sell that woman's book in the gift shop!" Ironically, the ghost stories they tell during their tours are from this book. Tour Director Hester Eby has outlasted three different owners, including Francis Kermeen, and she continues to recount these same legends because this is what the visitors want to hear. Current owner Teeta Moss admits that the ghost stories are a "hook" to attract business to the bed & breakfast. The Myrtles is frequently promoted on television shows as a haunted guesthouse, while the 2005 episode of the *Ghost Hunters* propelled The Myrtles to stardom.

Figure 4.6 The sign that greets visitors at The Myrtles Plantation.

I didn't get too much sleep during my stay at The Myrtles, but not because of the ghosts. I was kept awake by the sounds of crickets, frogs, and traffic, but most of all, by the ghost hunters. These enthusiastic visitors stay up all

night as they rattle doorknobs, slam doors, and explore the premises taking photographs, and recording questions in their attempts to capture voices of the dead. They have the expectation of seeing ghosts, and are given the suggestion that they will see ghosts. Therefore, many of them do. There are natural explanations for these personal experiences, but many people prefer the supernatural ones. In effect, the ghost hunters create the ghosts, along with guests, visitors, tour guides, authors and others who add to its ever-changing folklore. Meanwhile, this gumbo of legends and stories obscures the real history of The Myrtles Plantation.

Chapter 5

The San Antonio Railroad Tracks

A railroad crossing in San Antonio is said to be the site of a tragic accident and is believed to be the most haunted spot in Texas. In the 1930s, a school bus full of children stalled on an intersection of roadway and railroad tracks. A train appeared suddenly, speeding along the tracks. The train engineer saw the bus and frantically put on his brakes, but it was already too late. The train collided with the bus, killing the driver and his tiny passengers instantly. To this day, the spirits of the children linger at the crossing to protect others from a similar fate. When a car stalls or stops near the crossing, the ghostly children push it out of harm's way. Afterwards, little handprints are found all over the back of the car.

Going off the Rails

The story of the haunted San Antonio railroad tracks has been told for generations. It has appeared on many TV shows, including *Sightings*, *Unsolved Mysteries* and *Fact or Faked: Paranormal Files*. The crossing attracts curious visitors from all around the country who want to recreate the phenomena. On Halloween, hundreds of people make the pilgrimage to the site in their vehicles, waiting hours for their turn to be pushed across the tracks by unseen forces. The adventure is a rite of passage for local adolescents, who visit the crossing at night with their friends to experience a haunting.

RAILROAD
CROSSING

Figure 5.1 Railroad crossing sign at the corner of Shane Road and Villamain Road.

Locals know the intersection as the “Villamain tracks” or the “ghost tracks”. They are located in southeast San Antonio near Mission San Juan Capistrano at the junction of Shane Road and Villamain Road. When I visited the location I found it to be heavily wooded, and it has an eerie atmosphere. The crossing is scattered with crosses, rosary beads and dried flowers in memory of the incident. I saw a rag drenched in a red fluid, looking like it was soaked with blood. Teddy bears, dolls and other toys are left as gifts for the ghost children, and graffiti on the tracks says, “R.I.P.” Yet it seems that the children are unable to rest in peace.

Figure 5.2 A memorial for the victims of the tragedy.

Any car that stops near the crossing, intentionally or not, rolls across the tracks to safety. To test the claims, cars approach the tracks facing west, so that they enter the crossing from the same direction as the school bus was headed. From this position the slight inclination of the road leading to the intersection can be seen. The driver stops 20-30 feet from the tracks, to account for the length of the school bus. The engine is turned off, and the car is put into neutral, as the occupants wait patiently for the ghost children to arrive. Some people then feel the car lurch forward suddenly, while others say the car sways as if rocked by invisible hands. Slowly but surely, the car rolls uphill and travels onto and over the tracks! There are a few reports of drivers braking before passing the tracks, resulting in their back windows being smashed by the ghost kids desperate to get them past the tracks. Some accounts instruct the driver to park directly across the intersection. Cars occasionally stall on the crossing, and it is joked that the ghost kids must want some company.

The crossing is a T-intersection, so when the vehicle is safely across the tracks the driver must steer to the right to avoid a dense border of trees straight ahead. The experiment is a social event. It is custom to park on the downhill side, get out of the car to inspect the body for any handprints, and to compare experiences with other visitors. Some people find ghostly handprints appear in the dust or dew on their cars. Today, it is popular to dust the car's trunk and rear bumper with baby powder or flour before crossing the tracks. Handprints or fingerprints typically materialize in the powder, and little markings are said to be those of the ghost children, while larger handprints are believed to be the hands of the bus driver. Talcum powder won't work for those with white-colored cars, although one woman reports that after crossing the tracks she was horrified to discover droplets of blood on her white car.

Figure 5.3 The approach to the haunted railroad tracks.

People experience other kinds of paranormal activity in the area. Some hear the sounds of a train approaching, and the blowing of a steam train whistle or horn. Most often, people hear the voices and laughter of children, as though they are playing in a schoolyard. Sometimes people hear whispers, footsteps or running outside the car while they are crossing the tracks. Some hear more disturbing noises, such as screams, moans or crying, and especially a little girl weeping. A famous photograph of the crossing is said to reveal the ghost of a little girl holding a teddy bear, and there are occasional ghost sightings of the victims of the accident.

A Runaway Train

In the *San Antonio News Express* dated November 26, 1989, Mr. David A. Burnett wrote of a strange experience he had one night. On February 13,1981, David was driving home late from work when he spotted a girl of about fifteen at the edge of Old Mission Road. It was cold and dark, and David thought the area was unsettling, so he stopped and offered her a ride home. The girl accepted and climbed into the car. She told him her name was Cindy Sue, although she said very little else, and David thought she was a

little creepy. As they approached some old railroad tracks, Cindy Sue began squirming in her seat. David asked her is she was okay, but she didn't reply. During the entire trip David could see through the corner of his eye that she was staring at him.

When they arrived at Cindy Sue's house she seemed reluctant to leave the car. Assuming she had fought with her parents or run away from home, David said he would speak to them. He rang the doorbell and the couple that answered the door seemed much older than David expected the girl's parents to be. When he said that Cindy Sue was in the car they looked at him like he was crazy. The elderly man became upset and ordered David to get off their property, or else he would call the police. As David walked back to his car the man yelled, "Quit doing this to us. Let Cindy Sue rest in peace!"

When David got back to his car Cindy Sue was gone. Strangely, he never heard the car door open or close. She had simply vanished. When she sat in the car David saw her lock the door and fasten her seat belt. To his disbelief, the door was still locked and her seat belt securely in place. Then he remembered why he had found the area unsettling. Many years ago a bus accident in the area had killed several children. In memory of these students, the streets in the neighborhood had been changed to the names of those who had died, including Bobbie Allen and Laura Lee. As David drove away he noticed the name of the street right near the railroad tracks: Cindy Sue.

Figure 5.4 Streets of San Antonio named after the children who allegedly died in the accident.

Keeping on Track

When facing the tracks the road in the distance appears to be slightly inclined. However, what seems to be going uphill is really going downhill. Surveyors have measured the road and discovered that instead of an upward grade, there is a declination of two degrees. Cars are not pushed across the crossing by tiny, ghostly hands. A car left out of gear on a decline will naturally roll downhill and gain enough momentum to move the car up and over the slight bump of the railroad tracks. Known as a “gravity hill”, this is an optical illusion.

When I visited the crossing it was teeming with drive-by ghost hunters. I spoke with the occupants of one car and they had spent the previous night testing the theory, but they didn’t experience the phenomena. It turns out that they had parked on the tracks instead of 20-30 feet before the crossing. Many versions of the story tell that the driver needs to start directly on the tracks, although people who follow this instruction find that nothing happens. The crossing itself is level, so the car will stay stationary and not

roll downwards. Of course, if the driver starts 20-30 feet before the tracks the vehicle is already out of harm's way.

Figure 5.5 A carload of visitors test the baby powder theory.

The ghostly handprints that people find on their cars were already there. Sprinkling talcum powder across the body of a car will reveal any preexisting fingerprints due to the oils in our skin. Those who don't discover imprints may have a clean car, although these latent fingerprints can appear even after a car has been washed. As for the woman who discovered droplets of "blood" on her car, this may have simply been mud splattered on the body. The resolution of the famous photograph of the ghostly girl is very poor quality, and the "ghost" could be the result of a lens flare, or an object in front of the lens. The image may even have been manipulated. At any rate, there are far too many possible logical and natural explanations to go jumping to paranormal conclusions.

During my visit I was surprised to hear a child's scream! I soon discovered the Victory Sports Park nearby, where children were playing soccer and laughing and shouting. The park is located on Shane Road, and possibly

explains the ghostly sounds heard by others during the day. The area is also residential so the noises could be coming from the nearby homes. These explanations make more sense than hearing laughter from the victims of a horrendous accident. As for sounds heard at night, the crossing is often busy with visitors who may be making the sounds, while the wooded area is also known for its coyotes and owls that emerge at night.

Figure 5.6 The Victory Sports Park.

A suspicious element of the story is that there is no single version. There are numerous variations in the details. Various accounts state that the accident occurred in the 1930s, the 1940s or the 1950s, although an actual date is never specified. The stories are conflicting and say the tragedy occurred during the day, or the night, and that the kids were traveling to school, or going home. Some stories tell that it was raining, hailing or snowing. The train engineer is blamed for speeding because he was running late, or that the noisy children distracted the driver. The bus stalled on the tracks, or its wheels became caught in the racks. The number of casualties is listed as 10 children, and alternatively as 15, 20 or 25 kids, or that there were no

survivors. In one story not only handprints are found on the car but hoof prints from a good demon that assists the children.

A popular version retold in the San Antonio area is that of a nun who was driving a busload of children home after a class outing. The kids were all fast asleep as the nun approached the intersection. When she reached the crossing the motor suddenly died. The train's lights were switched off, and the engineer was asleep. The nun panicked and tried desperately to restart the bus, without success. The train struck the bus and split it in two. The nun went careering off into the trees and survived, while the passengers were all killed. Suffering immense grief and guilt, the nun decided to take her own life. She returned to the scene in her car and parked on the tracks, awaiting a train. When a train approached she suddenly heard the voices of little children chatting. Then her car started moving and she was pushed off the tracks by an invisible force! She leapt out in relief and to her astonishment she discovered tiny handprints all over her car.

The wildly inconsistent details and dates are the hallmarks of an urban legend. There are also many variants of the Cindy Sue story, where the driver was a woman instead of a man, or the ghost was a little girl instead of a teenager. This tale has all of the characteristics of the classic "vanishing hitchhiker" urban legend. There is indeed a Cindy Sue Way near the crossing. The other streets in the area also have children's names, including Laura Lee, Nancy Carole, Bobbie Allen, Richey Otis and of course, Shane Road. However, it turns out that local contractor Tom McCreless built the neighborhood, and named the streets after his children and grandchildren.

A Train of Thought

The most significant evidence that this is an urban legend is that there is no record of the crash occurring in San Antonio. A real bus-train wreck sparked the myth, although the actual event occurred over 1,000 miles away in Sandy, a suburb in Salt Lake City, Utah. On December 1, 1938 a school bus traveled to Jordan High School during a raging blizzard. There were thirty-nine students on board, aged 12 to 18. Farrold "Slim" Silcox, the 29-year-old driver, stopped at the crossing as required by law. He had limited visibility, but he had never encountered a train before, so he continued, and the bus collided with a train. The 50-car freight train called "The Flying Ute" was

one hour late due to the storm. The train was traveling at 60mph, and it dragged the bus for half a mile before it could be stopped. The driver and twenty-five children died in the accident. This was the worst railroad crossing tragedy in U.S. history, and it led to train safety laws regulating bus travel when crossing railroad tracks that are still in place today.

Figure 5.7 “RIP” graffiti on the railroad tracks.

The city of San Antonio has adopted the incident as its own. So, how was the story transplanted from Salt Lake City to San Antonio? When the accident happened, San Antonio was subjected to almost two weeks of news coverage, in gruesome detail. The memory of the reporting served to convince later generations that the disaster had taken place locally. The existence of the gravity hill probably aided in the story’s attribution to San Antonio, and it has certainly fueled the legend. The Salt Lake City disaster occurred in 1938, but the urban legend didn’t surface until the early 1970s. Therefore, a similar school bus-train collision may have also contributed to the myth.

At 8:30am on December 14, 1961, a bus was transporting thirty-eight children to various schools near Greeley, Colorado. At the same time, the Union Pacific's "City of Denver" passenger train was headed to Denver from Chicago, and was almost two hours behind schedule. The bus reached the crossing, which was marked with a warning sign, but there wasn't a flashing light to signal the approach of the train. The driver of the bus, 23-year-old Duane Harms, stopped briefly, but did not see the train, so he started across the tracks. The train smashed into the rear of the bus and sliced it in half. The train was traveling at 80mph, and the impact carried the bus more than 50 meters. This was one of the deadliest accidents in Colorado's history, as 16 children were seriously injured, and 20 children who had been sitting in the back of the vehicle were killed.

The Wrong Side of the Tracks

Visiting sites like the San Antonio railroad tracks is known as legend tripping; the practice of bringing these legends to life. It is a popular pastime, especially in towns where there is little else to do, but it is also a dangerous one. This part of San Antonio is unsafe itself. Due to the popularity of the crossing, law enforcement patrol the area to ensure the safety of legend trippers, because it is notorious for drug and alcohol problems, and crimes such as car jackings and purse snatchings.

Legend tripping is especially risky when it involves railroad tracks. In 1891, a train jumped the tracks on the Bostian Bridge near Statesville, North Carolina. Seven rail cars and thirty people fell to their deaths. Legend has it that on the anniversary of the wreck, the sound of screeching wheels and screaming passengers can be heard, and the ghost of a uniformed man with a gold watch can be seen. In August 2010, on the 119th anniversary of the crash, a group of twelve ghost hunters were hoping to see and hear a phantom train crash. Instead, they heard the sounds of a real train. They scrambled to safety, except for one woman who fell 40 feet and was injured, and a 29-year-old man who was struck by the train and killed.

In June 2012, five teenage girls sat in a jeep at midnight as they played a game called "Ghost Train" in Poplar Bluff, Missouri. An urban legend tells that a local train derailed in the 1900s, killing everyone on board. It is believed that the ghosts of the dead passengers haunt the tracks, including a

decapitated man and a woman who lost her unborn baby. The girls were parked across the railroad tracks as they told ghost stories and fogged up the windows of the car to scare themselves. They awaited the “ghost train”, but were surprised when a real train approached. The driver couldn’t restart her car and the girls rushed to get out. Three of the girls escaped, but two girls couldn’t unbuckle their seats in time. They died when the train smashed into the jeep.

In April 2013, a man was collecting railway spikes for scrap metal in the south San Antonio area. A train approached and the engineer sounded the horn as a warning. The man failed to get out of the way in time and was killed. This was not a case of ghost hunting, but this is proof that these tracks are active. Cargo trains still use them, but there are no lights or crossing guards to warn people of impending trains. Trains are designed to be quieter nowadays, so people will usually see a train before they hear it. In trying to recreate the San Antonio tragedy that never happened, how long will it be before someone becomes a real victim?

Chapter 6
Silver Cliff Cemetery

There are many “Most Haunted” cemeteries in America. As the eternal home of Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau, St. Louis Cemetery No. 1 in New Orleans is said to be the most haunted cemetery in the country. Resurrection Cemetery in Chicago also claims this title, as it is believed to be haunted by the hitchhiking ghost of Resurrection Mary. Stull Cemetery in Kansas is known as one of the seven gateways to Hell, and is reputed to be one of two places on earth visited by Satan. Hollywood Forever Cemetery is the final resting place of many stars, and is allegedly haunted by a cast of celebrities, including the ghost of Rudolph Valentino. Silver Cliff Cemetery is yet another “Most Haunted” cemetery in the United States. However, this place isn’t haunted by your average ghost. In sightings that reportedly date back to 1880, people report seeing “dancing blue lights” that appear between the tombstones in the burial ground at night.

Figure 6.1 Silver Cliff Cemetery.

Folklore tells many stories of eerie lights known variously as ghost lights, spook lights, orbs, will-o'-the-wisps, corpse lights, or death candles. These lights are attributed to ghosts, fairies, angels, ball lightning, or UFOs. Silver Cliff Cemetery is not the only place in the country where ghostly lights have been reported. Strange spook lights appear to travel along the road and rise

into the sky near Hornet, Missouri, while mysterious lights are seen rising up from Brown Mountain in North Carolina. Texas is home to the Big Thicket Light that appears to travelers along the Old Bragg Road in Hardin County, while the Marfa Lights have been observed near U.S. Route 67. The Gurdon light seen in Gurdon, Arkansas, is said to be the ghost of a railroad worker who fell into the oncoming path of a train and was killed. He was decapitated, but his head was never found, so to this day his headless body is believed to search for his head with a lantern, causing the lights that people see.

Silver Cliff is a three-hour drive south of Denver, Colorado. The tiny town is nestled in the Wet Mountain Valley, with a backdrop of the majestic Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Silver Cliff was a silver boom town in the 1870s. An 1880 census revealed that the prosperous mining town had a population of 5,040, although the indignant townspeople scoffed that Silver Cliff was home to at least twice that number of people. Fortunes fell quickly, and by 1882 the town went into a fast decline. When the silver left, so did most of the people, except for a few who stayed behind to become ranchers. Today, Silver Cliff is virtually a ghost town of about 500 residents, although it draws a large number of visitors. For decades, adventure seekers and ghost hunters have traveled to Silver Cliff Cemetery to catch a glimpse of the dancing blue lights.

Blue Light District

According to legend, the sightings date back to 1880 when the blue lights were first spotted by miners who were traveling back into town. Some accounts add that the miners were a tad tipsy at the time too. There wouldn't have been too many tombstones in those days. The cemetery had only opened in 1878, and Silver Cliff's boom was already busting, but by 1880 the burial ground had a small population of about 18 permanent inhabitants. There are many variations to the story. One version tells that the lights were first spotted by a wagonload full of people passing through the town. Some sources report that the year was 1882, or 1890, and that the witnesses saw just a single light, or numerous lights. Other sources state that the lights weren't seen until 1920 when a group of drunken partygoers took a short cut through the burial ground at night.

Figure 6.2 A few of the cemetery's permanent residents.

Generations of residents and tourists have seen the lights since that first sighting. The best conditions to witness the activity are dark, overcast nights with no moon visible, although the descriptions of the lights differ. They are most frequently described as blue, but they are occasionally said to be white, yellow, gold, silver, or even green and red. Some report the lights as dim or dull, while others describe them as bright or even luminescent. Others see lights that appear as flames, vapors, a shimmer or a glow, although most reports say the lights are round. They are commonly described as silver-dollar-sized, or said to look like lantern lights, and they range in size from small spots to as big as a basketball. The lights behave as though they have some intelligence to them. They are said to float, hover, fly, jump, wobble, dance or dart across the cemetery and even bounce around the headstones. The lights fade or vanish when the person tries to take a closer look, but they soon reappear elsewhere. Sometimes there is just a single light, others report pairs of lights like animal's eyes, or numerous lights dotted across the cemetery. The following account by Patty Quinn reads as though the witness bypassed the cemetery and ended up at a disco.

Around 9:00, the first lights were seen. They were small, most about the size of a pinky finger nail. They ranged in color from blue to green to white to yellow, and various combinations of these colors. As time went on, the lights became more numerous, larger, and more active. Some seemed to be extremely active, darting from headstone to headstone, never stopping. Others seemed to float in a "lazy fashion," landing in the grass, on headstones, just wherever.

Some argue that the lights are not seen anymore, while others maintain the lights are seen all the time, and are bigger and brighter than ever before. There are many paranormal explanations for the lights, and several of these are in keeping with the miner theme. The lights are often said to be the lantern lights or helmet lamps of unsuccessful miners whose ghosts are still searching for silver on the hillside. One story says that the lights are the restless souls of the old miners who died in the town. A more ominous tale tells that there was a mining scam in the 1870s resulting in a number of murders, and the lights are the spirits of these victims. Some people believe that the lights are the manifestation of a little girl who was buried in the cemetery. Another theory is that the lights are fairies because the cemetery was buried on a fairy mound called a sidhe. In Native American folklore, spots of light are believed to be disembodied souls, so there is a theory that Silver Cliff rests on a burial mound, and the lights are the spirits of native people.

Witnesses report other phenomena in conjunction with the lights. People claim to hear moans, cries, and screams, or they experience an inexplicable sense of tension or panic. Those visitors who purport to have psychic abilities say they receive telepathic messages from the lights that reveal the stories of those buried in the cemetery. Some locals say that horses, dogs and other animals sense danger and refuse to travel past the cemetery or enter the grounds. Conversely, many people don't see the lights at all, so the theory arose that the lights "choose" who gets to see them. A number of years ago a psychic from the nearby town of Pueblo sold pieces of magic glass said to enable the viewer to see a human form in each light.

A Guiding Light

The Silver Cliff lights received nationwide attention when the story appeared in *National Geographic* magazine. Various sources state that the article was published in 1963, 1967, 1969, or even as late as the 1980s, but it actually appears in the August 1969 issue. It is widely repeated that this was an investigation, an in-depth study or a feature about the lights. However, "Colorado: The Rockies' Pot of Gold" by Edward Linehan is a travel piece, and the phenomenon is only mentioned in a paranormal postscript at the very end of the 42-page article. The author recounts his personal experience but doesn't provide the backstory to the lights.

Eerie Lights Await Explanation

I recall quite vividly the last such town I visited before leaving Colorado--a place called Silver Cliff in the Wet Mountain Valley west of Pueblo. Today it counts about 110 year-round residents, where once 5,000 lived. "Be sure to get there after dark," a fellow camper from Kansas had told me, "and drive out to the old cemetery. You'll see something mighty strange." We had bounced about a mile out of Silver Cliff across pitch-black prairie when Bill Kleine, who runs the local campground, told me to pull up and switch my headlights off. "Do you believe it?" I asked him. "About the lights in the graveyard?" "I've seen them plenty of times. This is a good night for them-overcast, no moon."

We climbed out beside the old burying ground, and for long minutes I strained to see something, anything. Slowly, vague outlines of grave markers emerged, in ragged rows. "There." Bill's voice was quiet, almost a whisper. "And over there!" I saw them too. Dim, round spots of blue white light glowed ethereally among the graves. I found another, and stepped forward for a better look. They vanished. For 15 minutes we walked about the place, pursuing one will-o'-the-wisp, then another. I aimed my flashlight at one eerie glow and switched it on. It revealed only a tombstone.

This is the most widely referenced article about the Silver Cliff lights; however, it came to light that it is not the first documented report. An article that appeared in *The New York Times* on August 20, 1967 predates the mention in the *National Geographic* by two years. "Hunting Ghosts in a Ghost Town Out West" tells the most popular legend about how the lights

were discovered, but curiously it gives an entirely different description of the lights.

The legends say that the dancing lights were first seen in the pre-dawn hours of a bitter winter day in 1880. A small group of miners was returning to Silver Cliff after a rip-roaring party in the nearby mining town of Rosita. They were still a bit unsteady of foot after the festivities and were laughing as they recalled the raucous highlights of the dance-hall social.

Their route back to Silver Cliff took them past the old cemetery here and, as they passed the place, one of the miners stopped, grasped the arm of a companion and pointed into the burial ground. There, flickering on the carved surface of a freshly raised tombstone was a blue flame. The miners stared with fascination for a while – a very short while – and, with less stagger and more speed, headed quickly for nearby Silver Cliff.

Over the two year period of 1967 to 1969 the description of the lights evolved from a single "blue flame" in *The New York Times* to being described as numerous, "dim, round spots of blue-white light" in *National Geographic* magazine. According to modern sightings, the lights can be any color, any size and any shape.

Beginning to See the Light

There is no debate that the lights exist, although there is great debate as to the source of the lights. Stories about the Silver Cliff Cemetery say that the dancing lights are "unexplained", that there is "no rational explanation" for the lights, and that "research proved it isn't from a light source". However, many natural explanations have been posited to explain the lights, although some are more plausible than others. One theory says that fireflies or glowworms cause the lights, but these insects prefer humid climates and are not found in this dry region. A similar explanation is that the lights are produced by foxfire known as "fairy fire", or other bioluminescent fungi present in rotting wooden tombstones and fences. This theory is suggested in both articles. As the National Geographic says, "Some people think it's phosphorescence (…) from decaying wood in the crosses or something." However, like the luminous insects, this kind of fungi prefers swamps and moist areas in woodlands. The New York Times also proposes that the lights

are emitted from minerals or radioactive materials in the ground, although this type of light only lasts a short amount of time.

The earliest sighting of a single blue flame, as noted in the New York Times, describes combustion, rather than the soft glow of luminescence. For this reason, some sleuths have theorized that St. Elmo's fire causes the lights. This phenomenon appears when the air is electrically charged, and produces a bright blue or purple glow that can last for several minutes, often creating a hissing sound. However, St. Elmo's fire usually occurs on sharp or pointed objects, such as the mast of a ship, church spires, or the wings of an aircraft. Some believe that the lights are caused by ball lightning, a ball of electricity that can range from the size of a pea to several meters in width. However, this kind of light doesn't closely describe the phenomenon at Silver Cliff, and after all, there is only anecdotal evidence of ball lightning. None of these theories can explain why the lights seem to dance and disappear, and why the lights have been seen frequently and continuously for over 130 years.

There is a simple and natural phenomenon that could possibly explain the lights and their movement, and their preference for dark, moonless nights: reflections. Silver Cliff is flanked by its sister city of Westcliffe, and both towns provide lights from streets, businesses, houses, and vehicles that could reflect onto the tombstones in the nearby cemetery. The New York Times reported that old-timers "usually lean towards the belief that reflections from the lights in the valley are responsible for the mysterious flames." However, in this same article, former Custer Country judge August Menzel disagreed. To counter this explanation he shared this anecdote. "One night, everybody in Silver Cliff and Westcliffe shut off their lights at the same time. This included the street lights, but that did not affect the grave lights. They were still there, and a lot of us saw them".

The National Geographic adds to the debate, "Others say it's just reflections from the lights of Silver Cliff, or Westcliffe down there. I looked back at the two towns. Those small clusters of lights seemed far too faint to reflect way out here. Still, it was possible." However, the author's friend Bill argues, "My wife and I have both seen these lights when the fog was so thick you couldn't see the towns at all." A popular counterargument is that reflections from homes and car lights obviously couldn't have been the source of the

nineteenth century sightings, so there must be something mysterious taking place at the cemetery.

Figure 6.3 Some of the reflective tombstones in the cemetery.

An article in a 1998 issue of Skeptical Inquirer magazine responds to this snag. The authors suggest that reflective lights from stars might have caused these early sightings. It is true that the skies of Silver Cliff are often illuminated brilliantly by stars. These skeptics saw the lights too. They concluded that reflections are the most likely explanation for the lights they saw, caused by human-made sources, such as street lights, and lights from cars or houses reflecting off the "mirrors" created by the smooth marble tombstones. This theory is borne out by investigations into other ghost lights, including the Marfa lights in Texas and the Brown Mountain Lights in North Carolina that are both created by the reflections of car headlights.

Some people prefer the paranormal explanations because the natural ones are too mundane. Sometimes they know there's a rational explanation, but this is overlooked for reasons of sentimentality. As Jim Little, Editor of the local newspaper the Wet Mountain Tribune, said, "I don't know if I want to go out

there as a grown man and blow it." The *National Geographic* article admitted, "No doubt someone, someday, will prove there's nothing at all supernatural in the luminous manifestations of Silver Cliff's cemetery. And I will feel a tinge of disappointment. I prefer to believe they are the restless stirrings of the ghosts of Colorado, eager to get their Centennial State on with its pressing business: seeking out and working the bonanzas of a second glorious century."

Lights! Camera! Action?

I visited Silver Cliff Cemetery with fellow investigator Matthew Baxter. We spoke with some of the locals and each of these people had heard that the cemetery was "haunted", and some had experienced the phenomenon firsthand. We took Mill Road from State Highway 96, and drove about a mile before a tall iron arch welcomed us to Silver Cliff Cemetery. A hand-painted wooden sign once read, "Founded in 1878, Famous for Ghost Lights Reported in National Geographic". This sign has since been stolen. Silver Cliff is a remote town, but this didn't deter the several carloads of people who visited the cemetery during the time we were there. These weren't mourners who were there to pay their respects; they were checking out the "haunted cemetery".

Figure 6.4 Solar-powered lights in the cemetery with the towns of Silver Cliff and Westcliffe in the backdrop.

We visited the cemetery during the day to scope out the grounds. It was a sunny yet cold and windy afternoon in late spring. Silver Cliff is a small, well-maintained cemetery and there is only a sparse smattering of tombstones across the grounds. The cemetery is only 40% occupied with about 336 burials, and a cheap plot can be purchased for a mere $100. Some of the headstones were made of iron, although most were of polished or rough-cut stone in grey, black, red, or cream marble. Nowadays, there are very few permanent wooden crosses used as markers. There are many wooden fence posts bordering the grounds, but not within the cemetery itself. There didn't appear to be any rotting matter. We spotted some solar-powered lights and blue reflectors that may be sources of light at night. Beyond the boundaries of the cemetery a tall white cross can be seen in the distance. This marks "The Assumption", a sister cemetery for Catholic

burials. This is the forgotten cemetery, and the lights are not typically attributed to this second burial ground.

Figure 6.5 The lonely cemetery with its sparse tombstones.

We returned to the cemetery at 7:00pm as the skies darkened slowly. By about 8:30pm the sun had set. At 9:00pm, the conditions were cold and dark with cloud cover, although street and house lights from the town could be seen easily in the near distance. We could also see the dim blue glow of the solar-powered lights, but not the reflectors. We allowed our eyes to adjust to the darkness, and soon we started seeing different kinds of lights. These lights reflected off tombstones that were highly polished; they were not behind or between them. There were bright lights that darted about the cemetery. These moving lights clearly came from cars as they passed through the town coming from various directions. There were also dim glowing lights that were stationary because they were reflections from houses, shops, or streetlights. These lights still appeared to move, that is, when we moved. If we approached one of these lights they seemed to disappear, but only because our angle had changed. The lights were white,

yellow, orange or blue, depending on their source, and they were of different shapes as they reflected off the various carved surfaces of the tombstones. Each of these types of lights could also be seen in the Assumption cemetery.

During our time in the cemetery we experienced another visual effect known as afterimages, ghost images, or image burn-in. When we stared into the lights in the distance and then looked back into the darkness of the cemetery, we experienced an afterimage of the lights. This is a common optical illusion where an image or light source continues to appear in one's vision after the exposure to the original image has ended. This is the same phenomenon that occurs when we see a spot of light after a camera flash has been fired. This also gives the impression that the lights are moving about the cemetery when it is really our eyes that are moving.

Figure 6.6 The Assumption Cemetery, Silver Cliff's sister cemetery for Catholic burials.

Seeing the Dancing Lights in a New Light

By now it appeared as though reflections were the main culprits. However, given the range of descriptions and experiences it seems that there are several phenomena occurring in the cemetery, especially with the modern sightings. Aside from reflections, afterimages and solar lights, another possible explanation for the colored lights might be phosphenes. These are brief sparks or flashes of light that are seen when there is no light entering the eye. You've probably experienced this yourself when you've seen "stars" after rubbing your eyes, following a heavy sneeze, or a bump on the head. They can be seen with closed eyes, or in the dark with open eyes.

The phosphenes create patterns of dots, lines, spirals, circles, crosses and more in a light show of vivid colors, including yellow, green, red, purple, grey, and blue. Importantly, phosphenes are seen when someone spends a long time in the dark, for example, when someone sits in a dark cell, a cave, or a cemetery for a prolonged period of time. For this reason, the phenomenon is known as "prisoner's cinema". They can also occur under fatigue, sensory deprivation and periods of intense concentration. Phosphenes normally appear to float, but eye movements can also induce them. This could also explain the lights "dancing" across the cemetery, and why they disappear when you try to take a closer look.

A newly-discovered light receptor on the retina of the eye may provide some insight into the lights often appearing blue. This receptor tells our brains whether it is light or dark outside. Interestingly, this light/dark receptor is tuned to only see blue light. By these explanations, it is possible that under similar conditions anyone could see these kinds of lights anywhere. It's just not as scary without the tombstones. However, not everyone sees the lights. This is telling, and supports the idea that seeing lights in Silver Cliff Cemetery at nighttime can sometimes be a personal experience, caused by the eyes and mind after spending many hours determined to "see" something.

Another reason that people see the lights is because they think they should. There is a strong psychological element to the phenomenon, because people visit the cemetery hoping and expecting that they will see the lights. There is also a kind of paranormal peer pressure to see the lights, because so many other people say they do. In what is known as communal reinforcement, the

legends of Silver Cliff Cemetery have been passed down from generation to generation, reinforcing the claims and turning them into beliefs along the way. The stories have traveled far beyond the local community too, appearing in reputable publications such as the New York Times and National Geographic, and in books, on the Internet and retold by word of mouth.

Despite these many explanations I still couldn't explain the miners' sighting of the "blue flame" as described in the New York Times. It turns out I didn't need to explain this because it never happened.

Reflections of the Way Life Used To Be

In a café in Silver Cliff I picked up a copy of the Wet Mountain Tribune. This is the newspaper of Custer County and it has been published weekly since 1883. I assumed that they would have mentioned the case at some time. I contacted the Editor Jim Little and asked, "Has the Tribune ever covered the story of the Silver Cliff Cemetery lights?" He replied with, "It just so happens that one of our old-time columnists this week addresses the issue of the cemetery lights!" Jim gave me a copy of the article, hot off the press.

This was a short and sentimental opinion piece by Willdra Walker, a lifetime resident of the area. Willdra repeated the accounts of the first sighting in 1880, and that either a wagon of people witnessed the lights, or a group of drunken miners. She spoke about the lights being an attraction for tourists, and the locals, and spoke fondly of her many evenings spent watching the lights, and even chasing them around the cemetery. As for the source of the lights, she says "Different people have different answers – if they have answers at all." Her own explanation was, "Most of the elusive lights I've seen appeared to be reflections of something, from somewhere, on the polished headstones." Surely this wasn't the first and only reference to the lights in the county's own newspaper.

"Has the newspaper published anything about the lights that dates earlier than this?" I asked Jim. "I think there was an article back in the 1950s," he said. "Old copies of the newspaper are available on microfilm at the state historical library." I visited History Colorado's library and spent a day with

the daunting task of scanning issues from the 1950s on microfilm. When I came across the spring 1956 issue I hit pay (cemetery) dirt. I found an article titled, “Silver Cliff Cemetery Ghosts Carrying Own Lights at Night” published on April 13, 1956. The article had a fascinating revelation. The original sighting didn’t occur in 1880; the lights had been witnessed for the very first time the week before!

It seems that one evening early last week some of the younger set of the community were taking a nocturnal ride, which carried them past the cemetery. As they passed the cemetery, screams of terror came from the feminine occupants of the car as they beheld numerous eerie lights dancing about among the tombstones. The youngsters fled!

In saying that reports of the lights date back to the nineteenth century, the newspaper’s March 21, 2013 article contradicts its original documentation of the lights. The Wet Mountain Tribune article was published 11 years before the New York Times piece, and 13 years before the mention in National Geographic. In that short amount of time, the urban legends developed, including the apocryphal tales about when the lights were first seen, who saw them, what they looked like, and that they were “unexplained”.

Wet Mountain Tribune

Silver Cliff Cemetery Ghosts Carrying Own Lights At Night

Curious Custerites Flock To Burial Ground To View Unusual Reflections

JIM CHRISTOFF ELECTED PREXY OF SPORTSMEN

Committees Named For Annual Dinner And Dance

FISHERMAN SHOW TO BE HERE APRIL 21

Municipal Water System To Be Improved By Westcliffe Board

Mayor Otto Voss Outlines Plans For Augmenting Town's Water System

Figure 6.7 The original article that appeared in the Wet Mountain Tribune in 1957.

How does this original article explain the lights? Some of the curious locals surmised that the lights were caused by radioactivity, so they tested the cemetery grounds with a Geiger counter, which disproved the idea that the soil was radioactive. Some wondered if the cheeky teenagers had painted the tombstones with luminous paint, but upon closer inspection this theory was shown to be wrong. Others believed the lights were reflections of stars on the tombstones, but the lights were still there on cloudy nights. However, the real explanation was revealed in the subtitle of the article that reads, "Curious Custerites Flock to Burial Ground to View Unusual Reflections".

The author concludes, “The most logical explanation, concurred in by many, is that the weird lights are reflections of the street lights in Westcliffe, which cast a bluish tinge and would reflect thus on the tombstones of Silver Cliff cemetery, even though they are over a mile away.” The truth behind the lights of Silver Cliff Cemetery was in this article all along, hidden beneath the many layers of folklore.

Chapter 7
Waverly Hills Sanatorium

People don't just visit Louisville to sip on a mint julep as they visit Churchill Downs, the home of the Kentucky Derby, or to see the "Slugger", the six story tall replica of Babe Ruth's bat. One of the city's biggest attractions is Waverly Hills Sanatorium. The imposing Tudor Gothic-style building still sits atop a windy wooded hill overlooking south Louisville. During the first half of the twentieth century, the United States was ravaged by tuberculosis, otherwise known as the "Great White Plague" and "The Captain of Death". Tuberculosis hospitals, known as sanatoriums, sprang up around the country, but in these days before effective treatments, death was common. It is believed that people were sent to Waverly Hills Sanatorium to die. According to legend, the hospital was a "death factory" where 63,000 died. Horrendous treatments, patient abuses, and cruel experiments occurred there, and it was the scene of suicide and murder. Waverly Hills Sanatorium is thought to be the "scariest place in America" and the "most haunted" place in the country, if not the world.

Figure 7.1 Waverly Hills Sanatorium.

Not for Consumption

Tuberculosis is one of the world's oldest human diseases. Mummies from ancient Egypt show signs of tubercular decay, and it was common in ancient Greece and Rome. There were many early theories as to the cause of tuberculosis. It was often portrayed as a demon coming to rob the healthy of life. In some countries in medieval Europe, people believed that a demon dog caused tuberculosis. The pooch possessed the body and started to eat away at the person's lungs, while the cough was said to be the dog's bark. Tuberculosis has been known by many names, including Phthisis and Scrofula, but in recent centuries tuberculosis was known as "wasting disease" or "consumption", because the patient became emaciated and appeared to be consumed by the condition. It was also believed to be hereditary, probably because family members often caught the disease from their ailing loved ones. Consumption was seen as a "romantic disease" that

rendered the patient pallid and languid, and was thought to heighten artistic sensibilities and ennoble the soul. Young women with the pale, thin, consumptive look were considered to be beautiful, much like the “heroin chic” look of more modern times.

The condition had an image change in 1882 when the German physician Robert Koch discovered that it is an infectious disease caused by the microbe *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. He demonstrated that it is spread by breathing infected droplets expelled from the respiratory tract of a sick person who coughs, sneezes, spits, sings, speaks, or laughs. Consumption suddenly became tuberculosis, a death sentence from which no one was safe. Those with tuberculosis were feared, and branded “lungers”. They were isolated from society, and hidden away in sanatoriums to live a shortened life of stigma and seclusion.

This ancient disease was still one of the leading causes of death during the first half of the twentieth century. In these years, Louisville, Kentucky, in Jefferson County, experienced an outbreak of tuberculosis. In an attempt to contain the disease, a sanatorium was opened about 1909. This original hospital was for the treatment of early cases, and had a capacity for 40 patients. By 1912, a hospital for advanced cases was opened, with a capacity for about 130 patients. This was still not enough for the demand, and people were being turned away due to a lack of space. On October 20, 1926, a five-story building was opened that could hold about 435 patients, to quarantine the sick from the rest of the community. In an interview with the *Louisville Times* in 1928, Director Dr. Oscar O. Miller explained, “The object of our hospital is principally to stamp out and control pulmonary tuberculosis. We feel that to make headway against an advanced open case, the isolation of the patient, by moving the focus of infection from the home to the hospital, is of prime importance.”

Get it off your Chest

Tuberculosis usually begins as a cold that won’t go away. Before the days of screening, the disease was diagnosed by way of its symptoms, including a loss of strength, tiredness, weight loss, chills, fever, a rattling cough, spitting blood, and a flushed complexion. Tuberculosis usually attacks the lungs, but it can spread to any organ in the body, including the kidneys, brain and

bones. The cure for scrofula, a tubercular infection of the glands, was once believed to be the “Royal Touch” of a King. Other traditional remedies included an elixir of garlic and dog fat, inhaling smoke from burning cow dung, bloodletting, or taking long sea voyages to exercise the chest through vigorous vomiting. Drinking milk was said to be beneficial, although we now know that tuberculosis can be transmitted via unpasteurized milk. If tuberculosis is not treated properly it can be fatal.

In the early twentieth century, doctors finally knew what this disease was and how it spread, but they didn’t know how to cure it. At the time, sanatoriums were believed to offer the best treatments for tuberculosis. Some argued that sanatoriums in dry climates were the most beneficial, while others advised that sea air or humidity was best for the condition. People went to Waverly Hills Sanatorium for the fresh country air. The hospital was considered state of the art for its time and there was always a long waiting list for admission. Therapies for less-severe cases included months to years of bed rest on the long solarium porches. Patients breathed in the fresh air no matter what the season, throughout Kentucky’s sweltering summers and icy winters.

Figure 7.2 An open-air solarium porch during the sanatorium's heyday.

Patients were called "invalids", and they spent their days reading or listening to the radio for entertainment, and were treated occasionally with movies and plays. Stronger patients were involved in occupational therapy, including basket making, wood and leather work for the men, and needlework and embroidery for the ladies. Waverly Hills had its own chapel, and they held regular church services and prayer meetings for the patients. In light of the long convalescence, the sanatorium had its own library, dentist, barber shop, and beauty parlor. Heliotherapy or sun-therapy was thought to be effective for tuberculosis of the glands, skin and bones, and patients sunbathed for hours in the blazing sun or sat below heating lamps in the colder weather. Good food was also believed to be healing, especially a diet high in protein. Having a good attitude was also thought to be important. The hospital staff tried to keep the patients in high spirits with their positive assurances that they would make a full recovery while they hoped for a cure.

Treatments for more advanced cases were less appealing and more invasive. The theory that bed rest was crucial to healing evolved into the idea that lung

rest was critical, so that the lungs could heal themselves. A number of surgeries known as “lung collapse therapies” were believed to rest the lung and promote healing. During the procedure called pneumothorax, air was introduced into the pleural cavity, between the lung and chest wall, to force the collapse of the diseased area and allow the lesions to heal. In a Phrenicotomy, part of the lung is paralyzed by crushing a major nerve, so that movement of the lung is restricted. Thoracoplasty was often a disfiguring operation where as many as eight ribs were removed from the chest wall in order to collapse the lung. A lobectomy or pneumoectomy involved the surgical removal of a lobe of the lung, if not the entire lung.

At the Top of your Lungs

The cure finally did arrive, in the form of an antibiotic drug named streptomycin. In 1944, Dr. Selman Abraham Waksman and his laboratory staff at Rutgers University discovered this bacterium that kills Mycobacterium tuberculosis. The number of cases dwindled gradually, and Waverly Hills Sanatorium finally closed its doors in June, 1961. The final patients were transferred to nearby Hazelwood Sanatorium. However, tuberculosis had already taken its toll. According to legend, 63,000 people died at Waverly Hills during the five decades of operation. Some people maintain that the death toll was even higher still, and various sources report that there may have been up to 100,000 deaths at the sanatorium. It is often said that during the height of the outbreak, the death rate was 1 person every hour, while other sources claim there were 3 or even up to 6 deaths per hour.

Since its closure as a tuberculosis sanatorium, the building has had a fragmented identity. In 1962 the building re-opened as Woodhaven Geriatrics Hospital. The facility closed in 1981, amidst rumors that patients were starved and slept in urine-soaked sheets. The next owner, J. Clifford Todd, planned to convert the premises into a minimum-security prison, but the outraged community thwarted this proposal. A project to remodel the building into a set of apartments also failed. In 1996, Robert Alberhasky of the Christ the Redeemer Foundation Inc. purchased the estate. Inspired by the Corcovado Mountain statue in Rio de Janeiro, Alberhasky had a vision to construct the world’s tallest statue of Jesus Christ. Failing to raise the necessary funds, he hoped to demolish the place, but he was prevented from

doing so because the building was listed on the National Historic Registry. Instead, he abandoned the place, hoping that it would be condemned and he could recoup his cash. The building quickly fell prey to trespassers and vandals, and developed a reputation for being haunted. In 2001, Tina and Charles Mattingly purchased the property on eBay and they are the current owners of what is again known as Waverly Hills Sanatorium.

Breathing Down Your Neck

It is believed that the many decades of suffering have resulted in a paranormally supercharged atmosphere, and Waverly Hills Sanatorium is said to be "the most spiritually active place in the world." The location has been featured on numerous television shows, including *The World's Scariest Places*, *Ghost Hunters*, and *Ghost Adventures*. As a result, it is a popular haunt for tourists, and trespassers. Visitors can attend a two-hour tour of the premises, or an eight-hour tour for "private paranormal investigations". The cost is labeled a "donation" towards the restoration of Waverly Hills. The tour begins with a screening of the *Ghost Hunters'* investigation of the grounds, where they recorded a moaning sound, and captured shadow people on thermal imaging cameras. The team concluded, "If anyone says this place isn't haunted, they're lying."

The gutted, defaced insides of Waverly Hills Sanatorium no longer reflect its majestic face. The enormous "bat wing" building with arms extended to the right and left, now really houses bats. When I visited Waverly Hills it was vandalized and devastated, and what remains of the walls are covered in grime, graffiti, and peeling paint. Rubbish and debris litter the floors. Most of the doors and windows are missing, not to mention parts of the ceiling, while some of the walls are collapsing. The building is infested with rats and is sprouting weeds, while the grounds are overgrown. The walls are covered with satanic symbols, and Rob, our "tour guide and historian", informed us that satanic rituals had taken place here during the building's abandonment.

Rob repeated the popular quote that over 63,000 died at Waverly Hills Sanatorium. The old building looks hollow, but it is filled with the pain and death that has created a wide range of paranormal activity. Many visitors hear doors slamming, phantom footsteps, cries, moans and groans. Spirit voices known as Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVPs) warn the living to "get

out" of the building, and poltergeists throw objects at people. People often feel a sense of despair, while some feel empathetic pain of the patients, including suffocation and nausea. On the TV show *Most Haunted* "psychic artist and medium" Brian Shepherd was so affected by his empathy that he began spitting up phantom blood. Visitors have witnessed full body apparitions of doctors and nurses, and seen the gaunt faces of patients staring out of the windows. A phantom hearse appears and delivers coffins and collects corpses. Cameras catch orbs and shadow people. Using a Flir thermal imaging camera the *Ghost Hunters* team captured a three-foot-tall shape running across the hallway. The guys from *Ghost Adventures* report a shadowy "creeper" that crawls on walls and ceilings, and doppelgangers of the living. Hundreds of restless spirits are trapped here, and many of them don't even know they're dead.

Rob told us that screams of terror are heard coming from the treatment rooms, where patients underwent Electroshock Therapy and other brutal therapies that were performed by sadistic doctors. They didn't treat the corpses any better. Deaths were so frequent that the staff had to pile bodies into storage rooms, and sometimes hang them on meat hooks. There was a frightening place called the "draining room" or "bleeding room". This was the last stop for the dead inside the hospital. The corpses were strung up from poles in the room like animals in a slaughterhouse, and then slit from sternum to groin so that all of their dangerous bodily fluids would drain out. Once this gruesome task was completed, the bodies were taken down, placed on a gurney, and wheeled to the "body chute".

Figure 7.3 The entrance to the "body chute".

Everyone entered Waverly Hills through the arched entrance, but the majority left the building via the "body chute", alternatively known as the body slide or death tunnel. According to Rob, patients were dying "at the rate of one to three people every day". The historian on *Most Haunted* said people were dying "one an hour, 24 a day, seven days a week", while on *Fact or Faked* Waverly Hills owner Tina Mattingly said that patients were "dying by the minute". The doctors believed that keeping up the morale of the patients was essential to their recovery, so to avoid them seeing a constant cavalcade of corpses the body chute was built to discreetly transfer the deceased from the hospital to awaiting hearses, trains, or ferries. This 500-foot-long tunnel has steps beside a sloping slab, with one side for the living, and one for the dead. Rob said there were so many deaths that the orderlies ended up tossing the bodies down the tunnel instead. To cope with the ceaseless deaths they had to construct a morgue at the end of the chute, and there are rumors of a mass burial ground on the premises. The body

chute is said to be haunted by the spirits of those patients who relive their final journey out of the hospital. The dark tunnel is terrifying to pass through, and sometimes, when visitors stop walking the stairs, the sounds of footsteps continue.

Rob told us that Waverly Hills is an eternal home to a number of recurring apparitions. An elderly female with long, grey, straggly hair makes an appearance to some people. She is in chains, and her arms and legs are covered with bleeding incisions as she screams, "Help me!" During the 1980s, a homeless man and his white dog took up residence in the abandoned building. One morning they were discovered murdered in an elevator shaft, and their ghosts are now seen on the third floor. Many of the ghosts are known by name. "Ralph" was a maintenance man in the hospital. His ghost is sometimes seen wearing his white work shirt and pants as he wanders the halls on the third floor.

Waverly Hills became home to many children whose parents were sick. Sadly, many of them contracted tuberculosis. "Timmy" was a three-year-old boy who died at the hospital, and now he is one of the building's most famous ghostly residents. He likes to play ball, just as he did in life, and Timmy makes his presence felt by bouncing or rolling a red ball in the children's ward. Many visitors have witnessed a ball roll back and forth, move in circles, and even follow people when they leave the room. The *Ghost Hunters* team believed they captured Timmy on their thermal imaging cameras as a three-foot-tall shadowy figure. Timmy also has a playmate named Mary Lee who runs up and down the halls playing peek-a-boo with visitors, even though she has no eyes. Some say the little girl arrived at the hospital as a healthy child, but then she contracted tuberculosis and died within its walls. A few years ago, a black and white photo of a girl was discovered in one of the rooms. It was signed, "Love, Mary Lee."

We climbed the stairs all the way to the fifth floor, the top level of the building. This is the home of the hospital's most famous ghost, the nurse of Room 502. In 1928, head nurse Mary Hillenburg was discovered hanging from the rafters of this room. The unmarried woman had an affair with a married doctor, and she soon became pregnant. Due to the contagious nature of tuberculosis, the hospital staff lived onsite and were not allowed to leave

the premises. A nurse giving birth to a child out of wedlock would have resulted in a scandal within the hospital community. Mary's grisly solution was to abort the fetus and flush it down the toilet. In her shame at what she had done, she hanged herself.

Figure 7.4 Room 502.

According to owner Charlie Mattingly, a former Waverly Hills employee by the name of John Thornberry confirmed this story. John worked in maintenance at the hospital, and told Charlie that he personally cut down the hanging nurse, retrieved the fetus from the cistern and gave it a proper burial. It is believed that Mary now haunts this room, wearing a white nurse's gown drenched in blood. Female visitors report feeling nausea and other pregnancy-like pains when they visit this room. Mary also has a ghostly companion. In 1932, a nurse contracted tuberculosis and, wanting to avoid the prolonged agony and misery that lay ahead of her, she leapt to her death from an open window. Some believe that she didn't have tuberculosis, but instead, she was murdered. According to this version, the nurse was pushed out of the window by one of the patients in the mental ward on the fifth floor.

Breathe a Sigh of Relief

Waverly Hills Sanatorium is the subject of many famous legends, but the facts don't support the folklore. The stories about the two ghostly nurses fit the profile of urban legend, due to the many variations in the details. The years that the nurses allegedly died changes from story to story. In some versions, Mary's lover performed a botched abortion, so he murdered her to make her death appear to be suicide. It is said variously that she hanged herself from a light fixture, from a pipe, or from the rafters. There are holes in all of these stories because the light fixture is too weak to support the weight of a body, the pipes and sprinkler system were only installed in 1972, and there are no rafters to which she could have attached a rope.

In one of the stories, a patient in the psychiatric ward on the fifth floor murdered the nameless nurse. However, the fifth floor wasn't a ward, it was an open space that was reserved for heliotherapy, and there wasn't a psychiatric ward at Waverly Hills. There is no evidence that any suicide or murder occurred in the history of the hospital. The administrative records have been lost, and there are no newspaper accounts of these events, although there are state records of all deaths. These records reveal that two nurses died in 1928. However, only one of the women was formerly a member of the staff, and both women died of tuberculosis. Furthermore, there is no record of a patient named Mary Hillenburg at the hospital. There

was a John Godfrey Thornberry who had been a fireman at the hospital, although he couldn't possibly have spoken to Charlie Mattingly. The Mattinglys bought the building in 2001, and John Thornberry died in 1970.

The tales of Timmy have changed over time too. Sometimes Timmy has a blue or a red ball, but in earlier stories he had an antique-sounding leather ball. In footage captured by paranormal investigators the ball is never bounced, thrown or played with in the manner a child would. Instead, the balls appear to roll due to the wind, or an uneven floor. In the footage filmed for *Fact or Faked* the ball rolls on the floor, but it can be seen clearly that the windows are open. Until recently, there was no glass in the windows in that room, ensuring frequent breezes, as the hospital sits on a hill and has the highest elevation in Louisville. As a result of the open design, the building basically becomes a wind tunnel, creating subtle gusts and whirlwinds that blow the balls in unexpected directions. Furthermore, Timmy wasn't always Timmy, he has also been known as Tommy, Bobby, or Peter. As the folklore has developed, many of the ghosts of Waverly Hills have become composites. In an earlier version of this story, Timmy has even been Mary Lee. Mary Lee has been traced to a psychic who visited the premises and planted the photo to provide supportive "evidence" of her existence. At any rate, a separate children's pavilion was built circa 1914, although there never was a "children's ward" in the main building.

The "draining room" never existed. It was said to be located on the first floor of the building's north wing, although the mechanical drawings show that this was a breaker and transformer room. Electroshock Therapy was not a treatment at Waverly Hills, as it was a tuberculosis hospital, or Woodhaven because it was a nursing home. This myth might be built on the belief that Waverly Hills had a psychiatric ward, or was an asylum, or that Woodhaven was a psychiatric institution. Hearing "screams" would have been an unlikely sound during the days of the hospital as they kept a silence rule to further "rest" the lungs, and patients were urged to write instead of speaking. Also, the legends of cruel treatments and abuses conflicts with the reports that the staff worked hard to maintain the optimism of the patients.

These rumors of mistreatment may stem from the experimental surgeries that took place in the sanatorium. These surgical interventions may seem

barbaric, but they were drastic attempts to alleviate these conditions, and they were standard operations in other tuberculosis hospitals of the time. In fact, some of these surgeries are still performed today. Thoracoplasty or "rib hump reduction" is performed for severe cases of scoliosis, an abnormal curvature of the spine, while lobectomies are performed on many patients with lung cancer. As for tuberculosis itself, the disease has made a resurgence in recent decades due to drug resistant strains. The ancient scourge of tuberculosis still causes two million deaths a year worldwide, and it is estimated that one third of the world's population is infected with the tuberculosis bacterium.

Breathing Their Last Breath

The popularly quoted figure of 63,000 deaths is a gross exaggeration of the death toll at Waverly Hills. Unfortunately, the hospital records no longer remain. It is said they were destroyed in a flood that occurred in 1937, or during a fire, but it is more likely they were lost when Waverly Hills became Woodhaven. It is difficult to calculate the precise number of patient deaths, although there are some extant sources, including the 1992 autobiography of Dr. J. Frank Stewart. He was the Assistant Medical Director of Waverly Hills from 1945-1955. Dr. Stewart reported, "One of these years, we had 152 deaths, which was the highest in the history of the institution." This figure was taken from 1945, and represented an influx of soldiers returning from World War II who were suffering from untreated advanced tuberculosis. If we treated this figure as a maximum estimate, this would put the total death rate at approximately 7,600 patients during the 50 years of operation. This is less than 12% of the number quoted popularly, but since that was the worst year; we can assume that the actual figure is lower still.

John Amerine collects death certificates of patients from Waverly Hills Sanatorium. In his years of dedicated research he estimates that there was an average of 107 deaths per year, with a projected total of approximately 5,350 deaths. Instead of one death per hour, or even one to three people per day, this averages at one death every 3.5 days over 50 years. Deaths are far more frequent in regular hospitals. During the tuberculosis epidemic in Jefferson County, more people died of the disease at home than at Waverly Hills. Many of these people were on the waiting list to be treated at the sanatorium.

How did the sensationalized statistics originate? Perhaps the infamous "63,000 deaths" reflects the total deaths throughout the state of Kentucky during the pandemic. Alternatively, someone added a zero to the more realistic figure of 6,000 deaths, or they simply made up the number because it sounds shocking.

Contrary to the way it is portrayed, the "body chute" was not built for the purpose of transporting bodies. It was built in 1928 as an underground supply tunnel that connected the sanatorium to the valley below. Despite its name, the tunnel does not run beneath the hospital and it wasn't even attached to the main building. It is external and led to a road. The new owners have since built an outside walkway to the tunnel, giving the impression that it was connected to the hospital. It is unlikely that the tunnel was used to transport cadavers, as there are logistical problems and hygiene concerns with this theory. This certainly wasn't a practice at other major sanatoriums. Overall, there is only anecdotal evidence that the tunnel was used to transport bodies to a waiting hearse, while ferries and rail stations were not close enough to be convenient. It is also said that staff used the tunnel as a walkway to keep warm during winter. However, the ramp is too steep to be a regular pathway for staff, and it is doubtful they would have wanted to reach what was actually at the end of the tunnel. According to maps and photographs of that era, there was a concrete slab constructed for coal storage near the entrance to the tunnel. Coal was delivered to the hospital and stored in this area. Using a rail system, coal was transported down the tunnel, which led to a powerhouse.

Figure 7.5 The end of the tunnel where the powerhouse used to reside.

Breathe Easy

There are many legends surrounding Waverly Hills Sanatorium, although they arose recently, out of the building's abandonment during the 1980s. Trespassing teenagers from local schools used the location as a hangout, and they invented scary stories, including tales of a ghostly child and a suicidal nurse. When the Mattinglys purchased the property they invited paranormal investigator Keith Age and the Louisville Ghost Hunters Society to investigate the grounds for "hot spots" for their upcoming appearance on *World's Scariest Places*. This group and others spread the legends, and generated new ones. Oral history, television shows, documentaries, movies, books and websites are rife with historical inaccuracies, and their paranormal claims are equally unreliable.

There is a Waverly Hills Historical Society that was established in 2007 to protect the building's past. In the Waverly Hills episode of *Ghost Hunters*, they show an establishing shot of a library before their team historian meets with a member of the Historical Society. However, having been to the location, I could tell that the room where they meet is not in a library but on the grounds of Waverly Hills. Some digging reveals that Tina Mattingly is the Director of this Society, and this is an obvious conflict of interest. The Mattinglys ultimately have plans to convert Waverly Hills into a "haunted hotel and museum". In the meantime, they have turned the ruins into a commercially run "haunted" attraction.

The tour guides at Waverly Hills Sanatorium work hard to give visitors a paranormal experience. People are primed by the episode of *Ghost Hunters* shown at the start, although they've probably already watched this show and others. The tours are conducted in darkness, and flashlights are only allowed on the stairs so you don't injure yourself (although visitors sign an indemnity agreement beforehand). The guides use suggestion to convince visitors that they see "shadow people", instructing them to stare into the darkness, which often triggers an optical illusion that is construed as paranormal. Visitors have reported that the guides have plants who tug on people's hair and clothes, to encourage them to believe that they have encountered a ghost. Balls are strewn around the grounds to lend effect to the Timmy story, and visitors often interpret the mere sight of a ball as a sign that the ghostly boy is about. A former guide revealed that among their peers it was a badge of honor if they could scare someone enough to make them vomit or leave the tour early.

Figure 7.6 The solarium as it looks today.

The environment and atmosphere convinces people that the place is haunted too. The dilapidated building looks like a crack house, and during the tour, one of the visitors enthused, "This place *must* be haunted!" Of course, people will capture photographs of "orbs" in the dusty debris. Recorders will capture strange noises in a large, hollow, disintegrating structure with very few windows, frequent breezes, and trash blowing around. People will hear echoes of their own footsteps when they walk around in the concrete tunnel. A knowledge of the history of the building affects visitors too, explaining why some people suffer feelings of despair, or find it hard to breathe when they imagine tuberculosis patients wheezing and gasping for air. Just as the tuberculosis patients were once stigmatized, now the building is stigmatized by its history, appearance, and folklore.

Those who knew Waverly Hills during its years of its operation are dying out, and perhaps we should think of the place as they remember it. To them, the hospital was a place of healing, with a staff of committed and compassionate healers. Patients were not "sent there to die", but went there freely in their fight for survival. As a former patient Thomas Spies wrote to the Editor of *The Courier-Journal*, "May God bless all those who are making this institution one of hope to those suffering from this dread disease, assuring them that over the door might be truthfully inscribed, 'He

who enters here may entertain hope of leaving cured, or much benefited.’” Waverly Hills Sanatorium was a place of hope, the hope for recovery from this devastating disease, and the hope for a cure.

Chapter 8

The Winchester Mystery House

The Winchester Mystery House is an architectural oddity in San Jose, California. It began as an unfinished farmhouse and at its zenith was a 161 acre estate with a sprawling seven story mansion and an estimated 500 rooms. Today, the house boasts some staggering statistics, 160 rooms, including 40 bedrooms, 6 kitchens, 19 chimneys, 40 staircases, 47 fireplaces, 52 skylights, 950 doors, 3 elevators, 2 ballrooms and 10,000 windows. The house has many bizarre features, such as upside down rail posts, a staircase from the wall to the ceiling, windows and doors that open onto blank walls, and a door that opens outward to an 8-foot drop.

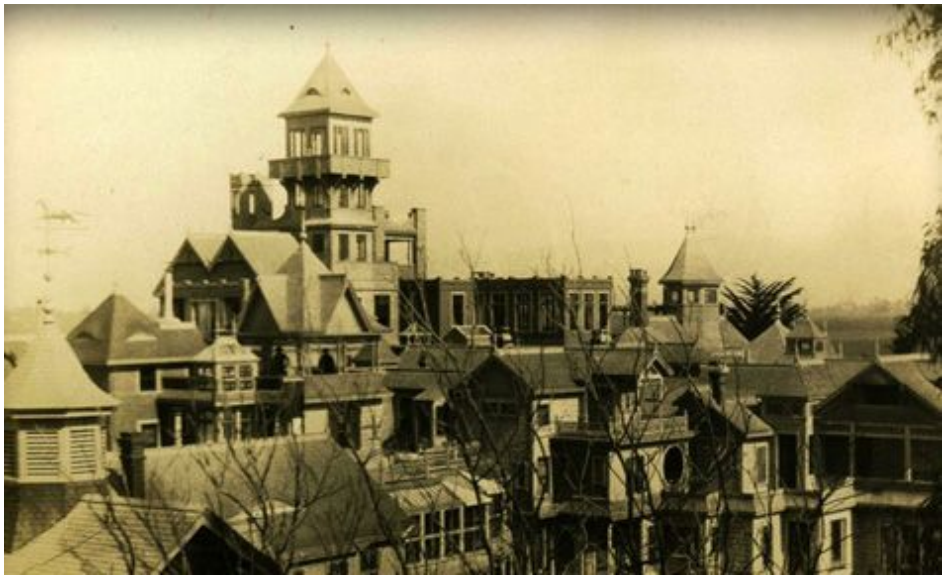

Figure 8.1 The Winchester Mystery House in its former glory.

This house was designed and built by Sarah Winchester, whose last name is famous for its association with Winchester weapons, especially the “Gun that Won the West”. Sarah Lockwood Pardee was born in New Haven, Connecticut in 1839. In 1862, during the height of the American Civil War, Sarah married William Winchester, the sole child of Oliver Winchester, who was soon to found the Winchester Repeating Arms Company. In 1866, Sarah

gave birth to Annie Pardee Winchester. The sickly baby was diagnosed with a type of malnutrition known as marasmus, and died a little over a month later.

The couple never had any more children and instead took to traveling, although Sarah's life was further interrupted by death. In the spring of 1880, her mother died, while William's father died at the end of the year. Within three months, Wher husband also died. As the last Winchester, Sarah became independently wealthy, although money was of no solace to this grief-stricken woman. In 1885 she moved to California to start a new life. The story that follows is as twisted and rambling as the Winchester Mystery House itself.

Figure 8.2 The Winchester Mystery House today.

Building on a Legend

According to the legends, Sarah was a deeply superstitious woman who was heavily involved in spiritualism. She felt a deep sense of responsibility for those who lost their lives at the hands of Winchester guns, and was frequently heard to refer to her immense wealth as "blood money". Guilt-ridden over the deaths caused by Winchester guns, and then beset by deaths in her own family, she became convinced that she was the victim of a curse. She travelled to Boston to consult with a psychic medium Adam Coons and he confirmed the wealthy widow's fears. The spirits of those people and animals who had died at the hands of a Winchester rifle were avenging their deaths by claiming the lives of her mother, father-in-law, husband and child. Sarah was next.

The psychic had this message for Sarah from her husband. "He says for me to tell you that there is a curse on your family, which took the life of he and your child. It will soon take you too. It is a curse that has resulted from the terrible weapon created by the Winchester family. Thousands of persons have died because of it and their spirits are now seeking vengeance. You must start a new life and build a home for yourself and for the spirits who have fallen from this terrible weapon too."

Coons advised Sarah build a house with a maze of rooms and passages that would confuse the spirits so they couldn't find her and kill her. A conflicting story is that Sarah was told to appease the spirits by building a house in which they could "live". She needed to attract the good spirits, but confuse or trap the bad spirits. Sarah was told to leave New Haven and move west to build this home, but the building must never end. As long as the house was in the process of being built, the spirits would not harm her. Sarah believed that if she continued to build, she would live eternally. As the spirits said to her, "As long as you build, you will live. Stop and you will die."

Sarah followed the psychic's directions and moved to California. She purchased an eight-room farmhouse in the Santa Clara valley, which she began remodeling immediately. She had a team of builders who worked around-the-clock for 38 years, from 1884 until the day she died on September 5th, 1922. The builders sawed, sanded, hammered and painted without interruption, in a constant work-in-progress. Sarah's goal was to never complete the building, lest the bad spirits exact their revenge upon the

last living Winchester. For this reason, the house is popularly known as, “The house that fear built” or, “The house built by the spirits.”

A Woman’s Home is Her Castle

The Winchester Mystery House wouldn’t be out of place on the Strip in Las Vegas. The Queen Anne-style mansion is a colorful, clumsy castle of towers, turrets, cupolas and cornices covered in fish scale shingles. On the inside it looks as though MC Escher designed the building. It is a maze of rooms within rooms, halls, parlors and stairways, all built to confuse the spirits. A Victorian superstition of the time dictated that one column in every home must be installed upside down, for good luck. Needing to attract more luck than most, Sarah had *every* column placed upside down, bar one.

Figure 8.3 The stairway to nowhere.

The mansion has many peculiar features. A stairway leads straight to the ceiling. Windows are built into the floor. There are security bars on internal windows. Countless doors and windows open out onto blank walls. There are miniature doors and balconies. Plumbing pipes protrude from the outside of the house, while chimneys appear on the inside. Many rooms have built-in shelves that aren't large enough to store anything at all. Throughout the house, switchback staircases have low ceilings and stairs that rise only two inches high because they are designed to slow down the spirits. Most famously, a "door to nowhere" opens outward to a two-story drop!

Figure 8.4 The door to nowhere.

Sarah built the maze-like mansion to confuse any lurking spirits, but the design truly succeeded in confusing the living, and especially her staff. She didn't ever want anyone to know her exact whereabouts, so servants were summoned to a wing, rather than a room. All of the bathrooms have glass

doors and spy holes, while the kitchen was designed so that Sarah could watch and overhear her staff. Some even believed that she could walk through solid walls and doors. If her staff ever discussed her building plans, or gossiped about her, they were fired on the spot. She wore a dark veil at all times, and was known to fire servants who caught a glimpse of her face. For their loyalty and silence, her staff was paid $3 per day, which was triple the standard rate of the time.

In total, the rambling mansion was remodeled over 600 times. However, the construction was crude and there were no blueprints. The designs for her building plans were sketched onto scraps of paper, napkins or tablecloths, and were destroyed upon implementation, so the spirits couldn't follow her plans. A less supernatural explanation is that Sarah was taken advantage of by greedy, opportunistic builders. The mansion cost five and a half million dollars to build, but money was no object. Sarah had a $20 million cash inheritance and the substantial income of $1,000 per day, tax free as it was in those days.

Upon Sarah's death, her niece and sole relative Frances Marriot auctioned off most of the furnishings. It took 8 weeks to remove all of the furniture from the premises, at 6 truckloads per day! To attract the good spirits the house had to be inviting, and so quality craftsmanship is found throughout the house. Sarah had exquisite taste, and paid careful attention to detail. The rooms were decorated opulently, some with Italian marble, gold chandeliers, and doors inlaid with silver and bronze. The Grand Ballroom has a pump organ, polished floors of mahogany, maple and rosewood, and lead-stained glass windows feature cryptic lines from Shakespeare, "Wide unclasp the table of their thoughts," and, "These same thoughts people this little world." Sarah was a preferred customer of Tiffany's of New York, and the house still contains many art glass windows filled with sparkling jewels. There are several recurring motifs in the house, including Sarah's favorite flower daisies, spooky spider web windowpanes, and the number thirteen.

Lucky Thirteen

In the garden of the Winchester Mystery House thirteen palm trees line the driveway while a topiary structure is carefully shaped into the number 13. Many people are afraid of the number 13, but Sarah was no

triskaidekaphobe. To her, the number was lucky, and she had an obsession with thirteen. Several rooms have thirteen windows, stairways have thirteen steps, floors have thirteen sections of flooring, and sinks contain thirteen drains. There are thirteen bathrooms, with thirteen windows in the thirteenth bathroom. Sarah once designed her own Tiffany leadlight window and created a piece that is a swirl of thirteen colorful stars. She even had an exquisite silver chandelier imported from Germany, but when it arrived it only had twelve gas jets. Sarah quickly added a thirteenth. Sarah's will is divided into thirteen parts and is signed thirteen times.

Figure 8.5 The tree sculpted into the number 13.

Sarah was preoccupied with death and life after death. She had a special "Séance Room" hidden in the house. The room has only one entrance, but three exits that cannot be opened from the other sides. One of these doors opens to a ten-foot drop to the kitchen! This is where Sarah held nightly séances between the hours of 12am and 2am. (Of course, 1am is the 13th

hour!) At midnight the bells in the tower would ring to summon the spirits to the séance. From the walls hung 13 coat hooks for the 13 colored robes she wore during her rituals. When the ceremonies were finished, the bells would toll to signal that it was time for the spirits to depart. Then Sarah would slip out of a window, onto a landing, down a flight of stairs, and yet, end up where she had started.

Figure 8.6 The "Séance Room".

Some say that Sarah's construction efforts were guided by the spirit of her late husband. Others believe Sarah's séances were an attempt to contact the spirits of those killed by Winchester rifles, to seek their advice and instructions on how the following day's construction should proceed. Of course, spirits don't make the best architects, which accounts for many of the strange features in the house.

Sarah never entertained, despite the fact that she had many lavishly appointed guest rooms, parlors and an elegant ballroom. However, Harry Houdini was an exception to this rule. The escape artist once made an impromptu visit to the house. The two had a mutual interest in the paranormal, so Houdini was welcomed graciously, and he even attended one of Sarah's secret midnight séances. Another famous gentleman never made it

past the front door. U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt was a fan of Winchester products; in fact, a limited edition commemorative rifle had been named after him. One day he made an unannounced visit to the house. The staff member who opened the door was obviously unaccustomed to visitors, and reprimanded the startled President with, “You’ll enter the house through the back entrance, like the rest of the servants!” Roosevelt was so highly offended that he left and never returned. In another account, Roosevelt requested a visit with Sarah, but he was flatly refused. She even refused to see a nephew who once visited. He waited patiently in the lobby, but instead a check was brought to him on a silver tray.

Sarah never had any houseguests, that is, if you only count the living. Of course, her entire house was built for these spirit guests; the ghosts of those who had died at the hands of a Winchester rifle. Every night, the lady of the house sat down to a lavish dinner, alone, or so it would seem. The elaborately decorated table was always set for thirteen; Sarah, and her twelve spirit guests. Sometimes she played the pump organ for their enjoyment. One day she announced uncharacteristically that she would hold a dinner party. She decorated the Grand Ballroom and even ordered an orchestra to play. On the evening she served caviar, truffles and pheasant stuffed with pate, all served on solid gold dinnerware, but strangely, no guests arrived. Sarah had organized the lavish party in honor of her invisible spirit guests.

Bringing the House Down

Sarah awoke at 5.12am on April 18, 1906, when the notorious San Francisco earthquake rocked Northern California. The walls shifted in her bedroom, the door jammed shut and she was trapped. Sarah has been in the habit of sleeping in a different room each night, to confuse the spirits as to her whereabouts. Again, this only confused her staff, when they couldn’t find her. After a full hour of searching, she was located in the “Daisy Bedroom”, so called for the daisy motif in the stained glass windows. A crowbar was employed to wedge open the door, and to this day, the marks can still be seen.

Figure 8.7 Earthquake damage to the "Daisy Bedroom".

The incident convinced Sarah that the spirits were displeased with her handiwork because it appeared that she was nearing completion of the home. She promptly sealed off the front section of the house, thirty rooms in total, and they were never used again during her lifetime. This was to ensure that the house was perpetually under construction. To this day, they remain as they were, partially remodeled and with broken plaster and damaged walls. This frightening episode persuaded Sarah to select a permanent bedroom, with easy access to her Séance Room, and it was here that she died peacefully in her sleep, at the age of 82.

When Sarah died, the news of her demise spread quickly throughout the estate. Her servants and builders immediately stopped work, and half-hammered nails can still be found throughout the mansion. A vault in the Grand Ballroom was locked at all times during Sarah's lifetime and only she had the keys. Upon her death, her staff eagerly seized them and unlocked the door. Inside, they discovered another vault. Inside, they found another vault, and yet another. After unlocking a total of five vaults, they came to the treasure in a tiny purple velvet box. This was not money or jewelry, as they had expected, but a lock of her husband's hair, a lock of her daughter's hair,

and their obituaries. Superstitious Sarah had stored these precious keepsakes carefully, hiding them from those who would use them against her in a curse.

Give up the Ghost

The Winchester Mystery House is another "Most Haunted House" in America and there are many ghost stories attached to the mansion. However, the official tour of the house is not a ghost tour, and the place is generally promoted less as a haunted house than as the house of a haunted woman. Nevertheless, numerous visitors and staff report paranormal activity, and people are encouraged to share their ghostly experiences on the house's website. A visit to the Winchester Mystery House is an assault on the senses, and accounts of paranormal phenomena include the sounds of phantom organ music, footsteps in the halls, and heavy breathing coming from empty rooms. Some people have heard their names being called, whispers and screams, windows and doors slamming shut, and the sounds of phantom hammering and construction. Visitors report the presence of cold spots, and the eerie feeling of being watched. They tell of strange smells throughout the mansion, including the aroma of chicken soup coming from one of the kitchens, and the scent of perfume coming from Sarah's bedroom.

Some people report being touched gently by good spirits, or being pushed by bad spirits. People claim to see doorknobs turn, strange red balls of light, and the sight of ectoplasm dripping from walls. There have been bizarre reports of visitors temporarily losing their eyesight while touring the house. In one story, a woman turned around, and saw a closet that wasn't there before. People have witnessed shadow figures, spirit guests dancing in the ballroom, and the ghosts of cowboys, Native Americans and other victims of the Winchester rifle. Others have seen people in 19th century clothing, and then recognized them as carpenters, servants and maids who appear in photographs on the walls. Of course, there have been many sightings of Sarah, including an apparition of her that walks through walls and doors. Some even claim empathetic symptoms while in the house; that they feel her arthritis pain in some rooms, or they feel nausea, dizziness or panic.

Many psychics visit the house and speak of strange experiences. Psychic medium Sylvia Browne conducted a séance at the house in which she was able to confirm the curse upon Sarah. Browne saw the spirits of Sarah and

the ghosts of fallen soldiers from the Civil War who live in the house. Psychic Jeanne Borgen visited the house in 1975 and performed a séance in the room where Sarah died. In the middle of the séance she took on Sarah's appearance and her pain. A witness described the incident. "Suddenly it appeared as if Mrs. Borgen's face had somehow aged – her hair appeared grey and deep lines creased her forehead. She felt staggering pain and was unable to walk. It was as if she were having a heart attack and, as she started to fall, she shouted, "Help me. Someone get me out of here!"

A Tour de Farce

The Winchester Mystery House really is a mystery because people don't always want to know the truth. A marketing survey held by the company reveals that visitors want to hear the legends of an obsessive, superstitious madwoman and her spirits. On the tours, the teenage tour guides recite robotically a strict script that is riddled with inaccuracies and exaggeration. This is a rewritten history so embedded that it's difficult to peel back the layers of folklore to find the facts. Here are some of the simple explanations behind the sensational stories.

There is no evidence that Sarah felt guilt about her family's trade. In fact, the Winchesters were originally in the shirt making business. They earned their wealth this way, and then used that money to invest in the firearms industry in 1866, but they did not invent the rifle. The company didn't only produce guns; they also made silverware, flashlights, fishing tackle, garden tools, roller skates and electric irons. The Winchester name was also associated with orchards. San Jose wasn't always known as Silicon Valley, but was previously known as the "Valley of the Heart's Delight" where plums, apricots, almonds and walnuts were grown in the Winchester farms, and sold under Sarah's own packing label.

There is no proof that Sarah ever consulted a psychic medium, and the name "Adam Coons" first appears in a 1967 book by Suzy Smith. However, Sarah did consult a realtor about finding a suitable property. Ned Rambo was the San Francisco Agent for the Winchester Repeating Arms company, and he showed her the eight room farmhouse in California. She purchased the house in 1886, not 1884. At this stage, this wasn't the "Mystery House" but was christened Llanada Villa, because the valley reminded Sarah of the Llanada

Alavesa in the Pyrenees, a place she had visited with her husband during happier times.

This was the heyday of Spiritualism, and San Jose had an active and open community of spiritualists, including Leland Stanford, the founder of Stanford University. However, Sarah probably wasn't one of them, as she was a practicing Episcopalian. Henrietta Sivera, Sarah's personal companion and secretary until her death, denied that her boss was a spiritualist. The "séance room" in which she allegedly communed with the spirits was just a bedroom for various staff members over the years. At any rate, séances are held in groups, and not something someone does alone. Finally, the bell was used not to summon spirits, but to call staff to and from work.

The house certainly has many strange features, but these weren't designed to confuse the spirits. Instead of hiring a construction manager, Sarah superintended the construction herself and drew up the plans and instructed the builders. However, she didn't consult the spirits for the design. She consulted manuals, subscribed to architectural journals and she had a background in interior design, landscaping, horticulture, woodworking and construction management. She loved architecture, just as her late husband did. Instead of trying to communicate with her late husband via psychics and séances, building and design brought her closer to him. Sarah may have been an amateur builder, but she was ahead of her time for environmental design as the kitchens, bathrooms and green house were designed to conserve water. For all of its weird features the home has many advanced features and mod-cons for that time, including steam heating, indoor toilets and plumbing, button controlled gas lights, and three elevators.

Sarah did indeed work on building the mansion for a long time, but this was not a plan to keep death at bay. She ceased construction on the house not because of her death, but because of the 1906 earthquake. The event caused extensive damage to the house. The entire top three floors collapsed into lower level rooms and were never rebuilt. Many of the third and forth levels were demolished, including an entire wing of the house. Sarah considered razing the whole house to the ground and starting again, but instead, she removed the rubble and left many of the damaged parts as they were, or closed off access to them. As a result, there are rational explanations for

many of the bizarre features. The “stairway to nowhere” did go somewhere, because it previously led to an upper floor. Pipes protruding from the house once plumbed upper floors. Damaged chimneys were sealed off below ceiling level, and second story doors that once opened onto a balcony now open to thin air. Sarah herself mused that the post-earthquake house, “looked as though it had been built by a crazy person.”

Perhaps the strange house wasn’t so strange after all. Building oversized and unique houses was a trend of the time for the wealthy, and several other people of similar social standing undertook projects on the same grand scale. Moreover, some of the peculiar features are artifacts of previous renovations, or they had a practical function, such as the winding double-back steps known as “easy risers” that were designed with Sarah’s chronic arthritis in mind. Some of the doorways are low because she was only 4’10” in height.

Figure 8.8 A miniature door added after Sarah’s death.

Some believe Sarah was an amateur builder, and that the house had many design errors. However, it turns out that many of these building oddities were added *after* her death, such as the doll-house sized doors, doors that open onto walls, windows in floors, bars on internal windows, and the recurring references to the number 13, including a thirteenth gas jet that was shoddily added to the chandelier. According to Sarah's former carpenter James Perkins, "the more irregular features, which have made the house a world-famed oddity, were built after Mrs. Winchester's death."

The 1906 earthquake caused so much destruction to the San Jose house that Sarah stopped any major construction, and only caretakers remained as tenants. In fact, Sarah owned almost a dozen properties in the Bay Area, and a house in nearby Atherton became her primary residence for the last 20 years of her life. Therefore, the house was constructed and remodeled between the years 1886-1906. This was a period of 20, not 38 years; otherwise the house would have been much bigger still.

Figure 8.9 A window in the floor added after Sarah's death.

Nor did her builders work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365-days per year. Sarah routinely dismissed workers for months at a time so that both she and they could take a rest. As an employer Sarah was well liked. Her staff was loyal and she was a generous boss, and a generous relative. The belief that she never had guests is inaccurate. She was the last Winchester, but she wasn't the last Pardee. Sarah had three sisters living nearby who had also moved from Connecticut. She had many nieces and nephews and was known to her friends and relatives as "Sallie" or "Aunt Sallie". Furthermore, Sarah's niece Marion Isabel "Daisy" Merriman lived with her for fifteen years until she married in 1903. Finally, there is no evidence that Theodore Roosevelt visited the mansion and was mistaken for a servant, or that a request to visit was refused rudely. Houdini did indeed visit the mansion, but in 1924, two years after Sarah's death.

Dead Women Do Tell Tales

Sarah was mysterious when she was alive too, and the myths were invented by the press during her lifetime. She became the target of outlandish stories in the society pages of various tabloids. These were the days of yellow journalism, when newspapers published spurious, sensational stories for entertainment value. It all began with the article, "A woman who thinks she will die when her house is built," published in the *San Jose Evening News*, March 29, 1895. The legends grew from there. They said that she was highly superstitious, and conducted unusual rituals in her home. They cast her as the conscience of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, who was shouldering responsibility for the numerous deaths caused by guns. They said she was mentally ill. Among her several homes she had a houseboat in Burlingame, and the press speculated wildly that she feared a flood of Biblical proportions and built her own Noah's Ark.

Most famously, the papers said that Sarah was superstitious and involved in spiritualism. However, those who knew her described her as a sensible, educated businesswoman. It's possible that Sarah is also conflated with a woman named Mary Folsom Hayes Chynoweth, who lived south of Llanada Villa. Just like Sarah, Mary had built an overly ornate Victorian mansion. Sarah was accused of being a spiritualist, while Mary was an avowed healer and spiritual teacher, who founded the spiritualist True Life Church. You

may be wondering why the press didn't pick on Mary too. Her sons Everis and Jay Hayes owned the *San Jose Mercury* and the *San Jose Herald*, the two local newspapers of the time.

The newspapers also branded Sarah a snob. It is true that she was a very private woman who ignored invitations to parties and didn't socialize with her neighbors or peers. This made her the subject of gossip, and allowed speculation to flourish. Sarah refused to be interviewed by the press, even to correct the rumors. In light of her reclusive lifestyle it is said that there are no extant documents revealing information about her, but this is incorrect. She left behind a wealth of letters and legal papers that paint the true story. Sarah lived in seclusion because she was embarrassed about her appearance. She suffered from rheumatoid arthritis that gnarled her hands and feet. She wore gloves to cover her disfigured fingers, and a veil to cover her face in public because she had lost most of her teeth. She didn't like to be photographed and only two pictures remain; one of which was snapped without her knowledge.

Figure 8.10 A rare photograph of Sarah Winchester.

Sarah built her labyrinthine mansion as a hobby. She also did it to keep the locals employed, as her father had been a carpenter. Sarah was very philanthropic and gave away a lot of money, and often anonymously. Her preoccupation was not with spirits, but fighting tuberculosis. Her father-in-law and husband both died of tuberculosis and Sarah became a major benefactor to fighting this “white plague”. She established the William Wirt Winchester Hospital, a tubercular clinic, which is today part of the Yale-New Haven Hospital. The newspapers fabricated the story that Sarah was trying to defeat death, but in truth she planned her own funeral and prepared a will; which was only signed once.

When Sarah died, John H. Brown purchased the house and opened it to the public only five months later. When he took over the house he also took over its legends, and created more along the way. The Brown family still owns the Winchester Mystery House, and they have turned the place into a major tourist attraction. As the guide said at the end of the tour, “Just like Disneyland, the only exit leads you out into the gift shop.” The owners are only interested in promoting the folklore, not the facts, and the mythology has become institutionalized. The portrayal of Sarah Winchester as a superstitious, obsessive, compulsive, crazy woman and her haunted house of spirits is nothing more than urban legend.

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Chapter 8 – The Winchester Mystery House

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Figure 8.9 Photograph by the author.

Figure 8.10 Winchester Mystery House.

About the Author

Karen Stollznow, PhD, is a linguist with a background in history and anthropology. She is the author of *God Bless America* and *Language Myths, Mysteries and Magic*, and pens the "Bad Language" column for *Skeptic* magazine. Karen was a researcher at the University of California, Berkeley, and has spent two decades writing about a diverse array of topics, including language, culture, religion, science, pseudoscience, and the paranormal. She is a Fellow of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry and a Research Fellow of the James Randi Educational Foundation. Karen was born in Sydney, and has a PhD in linguistics from the University of New England, Australia. She currently lives in Denver, Colorado, with her husband and fellow paranormal claims investigator, Matthew Baxter.